LIFE OF MILTON

RACINE

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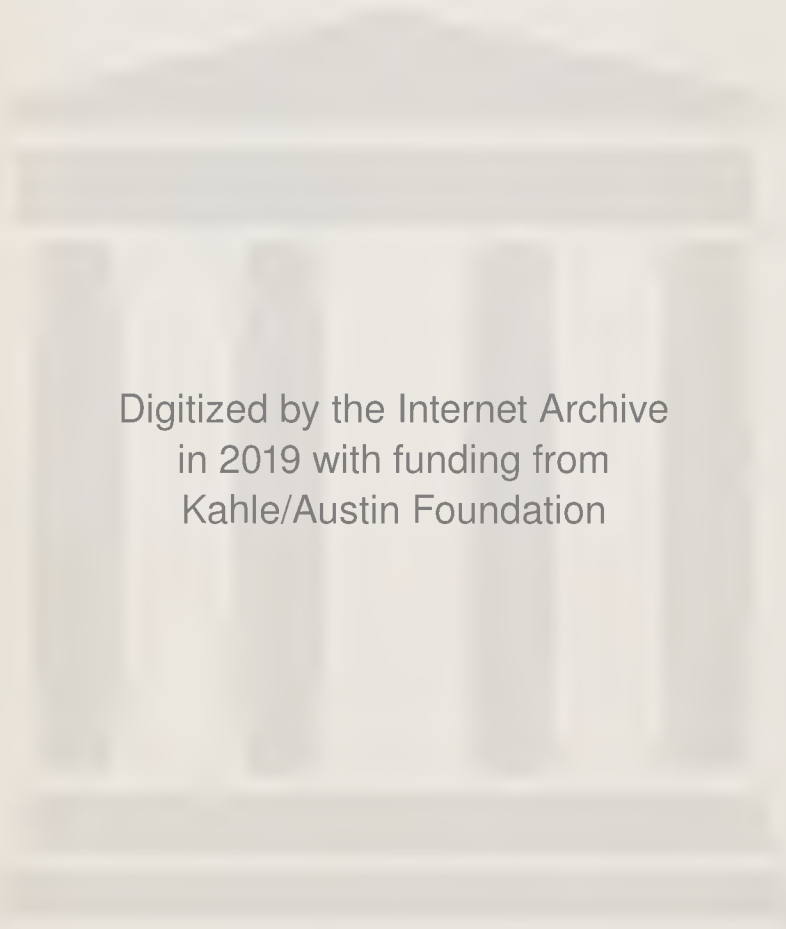
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LIFE OF MILTON

TOGETHER WITH

OBSERVATIONS ON *PARADISE LOST*

BY

LOUIS RACINE

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

KATHERINE JOHN

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

When Jean Racine, at the age of thirty-eight, grew disgusted with the stage and with the world, his first idea was to become a Carthusian. The priest whom he consulted on this point thought it an extreme measure, and advised him to marry instead. So he looked round for a wife. "Neither love nor interest," his son informs us, "had any share in so serious a transaction." A young woman was chosen on religious grounds—with a respectable dowry, however—and he settled down with her to finish his days in sanctity.

The sincerity of his repentance is vouched for by the fact that his spiritual guides were highly unfashionable. The Jansenist quarrel has been immortalised by Pascal; its first virulence was over, but the Jansenists were still being made to swallow the dregs of their defeat. The dispute had begun on the old vexed question of predestination and free will, on which the Church's doctrine was nominally that of St. Augustine: man can do nothing for himself, divine grace alone gives him the slightest merit, and no exertions will enable him to deserve it; it is a free gift, granted to some, withheld from others.

Many are called, but few chosen. This dogma had always caused uneasiness, and shortly before a few Jesuit theologians had made another attempt to soften it. Jansen, Bishop of Ypres, had retorted with a book enforcing the pure Augustinian doctrine with great severity. The Church, however, while in theory holding the same view, had managed to evade the apparently inevitable conclusion by distinctions imperceptible to the lay mind. This delicate fabric was menaced by Jansen's puritanical clear-headedness, and its architects were much angrier with him than at the harmlessly obvious heresy of Molina and his Jesuit friends. It was a heart-breaking quarrel to the Jansenists. They had virtue and logic on their side, but were at last persecuted into submission. It is true that the Jesuit doctrine was also discountenanced.

But though defeated, the Jansenists were by no means annihilated. In their sanctuary at Port-Royal they went on writing and teaching; an indomitable little flock, whose religion was primitive in its earnestness, whose intelligence, on the whole, was exceptionally high, and whose morals were rigid. Among these happy few Jean Racine had been brought up.

He hated it. Poetry, to his preceptors, was suspect, and the stage anathema. He wrote in secret, and was lectured interminably when found out. Still he put up with it, and only abused them behind their backs, for he was anxious to get on in the world,

and hoped that a benefice might be the reward of apparent conformity. He was a little like Julien Sorel. When this fell through, he broke away altogether, and took to the stage under the protection of Molière. From this new vantage-ground of independence he then turned and rent his old masters; he was an egotistic, resentful and rather cruel young man. He attacked them openly in a letter so witty and so virulent that it recalls the Provinciales. Relations were completely broken off.

Now he was free he lost no time. His impatient spirit devoured the world it had been longing for; he used it up with far more than normal rapidity, and was sick of it at thirty-eight. His triumph had turned out in every point a fiasco. His love-affairs had been first disastrous, and then dreary; his plays had been well received, indeed, but what was that polite *succès d'estime* in comparison with the fury and laceration of soul that had gone to the creation of them? He shared it with half a dozen scribblers, and he could never get a unanimous verdict that he was better than Corneille. The past was a failure, and he had nothing to look forward to but a stale repetition of it. In this crisis he returned to Port-Royal, and made his peace with the friends he had insulted. We have an account of his reconciliation with M. Arnauld—*le grand Arnauld*—the most important and least placable of the Jansenists. The way had been smoothed by others; then Racine made his appearance.

"Le coupable entrant avec l'humilité et la confusion peintes sur le visage, se jeta aux pieds de M. Arnauld: M. Arnauld se jeta aux siens: tous deux s'embrassèrent." And the end of all this turmoil was the marriage of *le coupable* with Catherine de Romanet.

She had very little to recommend her; we are told with pride by her descendants that she had neither wit, beauty nor fortune, though on the last article they exaggerate. What is more remarkable, she did not know her husband's plays even by name, and had no curiosity about them. Religion only was the bond. She was scrupulously pious; so, by this time, was he; and their children were brought up in an atmosphere saturated with religious observance. They had five daughters, most of whom went into convents, and two sons, Jean-Baptiste and Louis, who was twelve years younger. Jean-Baptiste showed a tendency to resemble his father, which the latter carefully eradicated. He was designed for the diplomatic service, but gave it up after his father's death, and became a recluse, almost a hermit; an interesting, puzzling character, that no one has ever got quite to the bottom of. The younger son had a better chance, for his father died when he was only six years old. Still he had his mother to contend with, as well as the whole circle of Jansenist friends and counsellors who shared her views. Jean-Baptiste, as a youth, had tried his hand at verses; Louis very early began to display the same alarming

tendencies. His mother of course was shocked, and hoped to reason him out of it, hoped to get Boileau to reason him out of it—Satan rebuking sin. The critic was Louis's old friend, and used to play at skittles with him—Boileau prided himself on his skill at skittles. The young delinquent was now brought before him on a more solemn occasion. He had been convicted of a dozen lines in which he poetically lamented the fate of a dog used as a subject in his anatomy class: and he got a severe lecture from his aged companion in error. How had he the audacity to write verses, considering the name he bore? Had a great poet ever been the son of a great poet, since the world began? and did Louis flatter himself that he was to be the first? Did he suppose he could make money by his poems? or did he imagine he could get on without money? Ought not his father's example to be a warning to him? The venerable mentor did not long survive this little sermon, which Louis's biographer describes as his swan song, and which was quite ineffectual. Louis listened submissively, but continued to write. In every other respect, however, he was a model character; he actually seems to have had no fault in his life beyond a mild little obstinate partiality for his own poetry, which did no one any harm. His mother, to do her justice, had some qualities Jean Racine was without; a placid temper and the most perfect indifference to position and money. These she passed on to her son. When it came to influencing his

behaviour, indeed, her remonstrances were less effective than Jean Racine's sarcasms had been on his elder brother; but he thenceforth wrote his schoolboy verses in secret, for fear of distressing her.

When he left college he thought of taking orders, and actually spent three years in religious retirement, with the Pères de l'Oratoire. In this retreat, however, the Muse was still his companion. He was now ready for a higher flight than he had so far attempted, and only wanted a subject. Unfortunately, he had very little imagination. "I believe," said one of his friends later, "it will be wise to encourage him in a sort of work which will leave him nothing to furnish but the expression." Happening, however, to come across a Latin poem by St. Prosper on Grace, he felt inspired to treat the same theme. He could not have chosen better. Grace—disputes about grace—had given birth to the very sect by which he had been brought up. It had recently been the vital question of the day. The fashionable world had been scarcely less interested than the protagonists. Everyone had been interested. Everyone had been talking, writing, arguing on the subject for years. Every conceivable thing had been said about it repeatedly. There was therefore plenty to say, and in addition it was a *sujet de sentiment*; it particularly appealed, Louis says, to the ladies. One more merit it possessed; the animation about it was dying down, and there could not have been a better

moment to pour oil on the already almost smooth waters.

He did himself great credit. All that could be learnt about the technique of poetry he had evidently learnt, being always a docile scholar, and passages from the Bible, from St. Augustine and from a number of modern theologians are strung together with address. He even presses Catullus into the service, observing:

> Faisons taire un moment les saints dans cet ouvrage,
> Et d'un voluptueux écoutons le langage,

though in another poem he remarks that "la pudeur s'alarme au seul nom de Catulle". He himself acknowledges *La Grâce* to be little more than a translation; but then he has restrained himself. He might have said several cutting things. "And I confess that at first, some satirical strokes had escaped me; but reflection induced me to withdraw them; and sacrificing without a struggle the interests of poetry to those of religion, I have chosen rather to weaken a few lines than to be witty at the expense of peace and charity." Shorn of these witty strokes, the work is agreeable, if thin. All its poetic substance lies in a faint but sincere melancholy, a gentle *nostalgie du ciel*, which seems almost to foreshadow the romantic movement, and gave the writer a charm for Chateaubriand.

Louis's intentions were pacific, but his poem smacked of Jansenism none the less. He described

later to J. B. Rousseau the reception it received from the Archbishop of Lyons:

"Je lui rendais une visite. Il alla chercher dans sa bibliothèque le poème de la Grâce; et, m'y montrant plusieurs endroits crayonnés de sa main: Ne croyez pas, me dit-il, que ce soient les beaux endroits que j'ai ainsi crayonnés: ce sont vos hérésies. Voilà un ouvrage qui sera votre condamnation au jour du jugement. Je lui répondis, avec une sincère modestie, que s'il y avait dans mon poème des erreurs, elles y étaient contre mon intention; que les fautes d'ignorance étaient excusables; et qu'à l'égard de la damnation dont il me menaçait, j'espérais l'éviter en m'attachant toujours à des sujets saints, et renonçant à travailler pour le théâtre. Eh! tant pis, s'écria-t-il, j'aimerais mieux que vous fissiez des comédies."

Voltaire, then in the dawn of his fame, disapproved also, but for his own reasons:

Cher Racine, j'ai lu dans tes vers didactiques
De ton Jansénius les leçons fanatiques.
Quelquefois je t'admire, et ne te crois en rien.
Si ton style me plaît, ton Dieu n'est pas le mien:
Tu m'en fais un tyran: je veux qu'il soit un père.
Ton hommage est forcé, mon culte est volontaire.
Mieux que toi de son sang je reconnais le prix:
Tu le sers en esclave, et je l'adore en fils.
Crois-moi, n'affecte plus une inutile audace:
Il faut comprendre Dieu pour comprendre sa grâce.
Soumettons nos esprits, présentons-lui nos cœurs,
Et soyons des chrétiens, et non pas des docteurs.

Voltaire exhorting the pious Louis to "soumettre son esprit" is the kind of stroke with which he was continually diverting his contemporaries. There is respect, however, in the tone of the remonstrance, for Louis was very fashionable at the moment. His name and his poem together made an impression, excited interest. People entertained themselves with a hope of the phenomenon which, according to Boileau, had never presented itself since the world began. The son of Jean Racine was always being asked out to give readings of his poem, and generally went, his youth and diffidence pleasantly flattered by success. Voltaire, of course, paid his court too. He wrote to Louis in the warmest terms, called him "digne frère d'Athalie", and subscribed himself his friend till death. Louis appears to have replied politely. But—there is no saying exactly how—the acquaintance dropped. They were not made to be friends. Louis was honest, pious, affectionate, domestic, dull; everything Voltaire was not. He was innocent of the least desire to stand well with the great either in literature or politics, and on the question of character he was rigid. He could never have taken his share in the brisk exchange of soothing insincerities which Voltaire called friendship. And Voltaire himself was soon too celebrated to trouble about him.

Meanwhile, the attentions paid to the young poet had done a good deal to diminish his taste for a religious life, and he began to think of the Académie.

Cardinal Fleury, however, dissuaded him. It was said that he thought a Jansenist candidature unwise, but he represented to Louis that poetry does not pay, and offered him a government post instead. Louis accepted. Indeed, he was hardly in a position to refuse. Jean Racine's fortune had not been vast, half of it had been swallowed up in Law's disastrous speculations, and he had left seven children to provide for. Still, Louis might have sacrificed the opportunity and trusted to chance if he had realised what was awaiting him. His love of home was strong, and his distaste for money matters decided; he now found himself exiled to Provence, and condemned to a lifetime of drudgery in the Department of Finance. And when he began to understand how the department was run, it became as repellent to his conscience as to his inclinations.

His arrival in Marseilles made a great stir. He was a poet, he was the son of Jean Racine, and altogether something very brilliant was expected. But on his first appearance in provincial society "during a two hours' visit he said nothing but yes and no, sometimes even mistaking one for the other". This put an end to his social vogue, which he had never suspected, and therefore could not regret. He cheered himself by devoting his leisure to poetry and literary dabbling. And in an odd moment he married; not without trepidation, for he was deeply impressed by the importance of the step, and took it doubtfully:

Hymen, je te l'avoue, à ta fête pompeuse
Je me sentis troubler:
Je portai tes flambeaux d'une main courageuse,
Mais non pas sans trembler.

It turned out, however, very well; his wife was sensible and affectionate, with a little money, too, and he began to be more comfortable. Comforts were needed; for his exile, which on setting out he had flattered himself would be a short one, now showed no signs of coming to an end. He was stranded, but there began to be mitigations. Mme. Racine was a Lyonnaise. Shortly after their marriage he was transferred to Lyons. There he was elected a member of the Académie des Sciences, Belles-Lettres et Arts, and he acknowledged the honour in rather pathetic terms:

"Qu'avez-vous à attendre de moi, messieurs, et que vous puis-je apporter, si ce n'est un nom illustre à la vérité, mais dont la gloire même fait ma honte, lorsque je considère combien je suis éloigné de le soutenir? Pour moi, je vous aurai toujours l'obligation infinie de m'admettre à ces savantes conversations, qui rallumeront en moi l'amour des lettres, mes premières délices. Fatigué justement de ces occupations si stériles à l'esprit auxquelles je suis contraint de me livrer tous les jours, je pourrai du moins, une fois la semaine, me venir reposer parmi vous, c'est-à-dire dans le sein des Muses, et leur rendre cette légère partie d'un temps qui leur fut consacré dès ma jeunesse, et qui leur serait encore

entièrement dévoué, si j'avais été le maître d'en disposer."

The truth is, he was an academician born, and always being elected to all kinds of bodies.

In these unhappy circumstances, however, and brief moments of freedom, he was at work on a grand poem intended to demonstrate conclusively the truth and beauty of the Christian faith, and induce everyone to adopt it. It was to be called *La Religion.* After the fine burst that supplied him with the subject and title, his invention must have been rather strained; and though his masterpiece did not, like the similar poem by Eyssette (Jacques), absolutely flicker out at the end of four lines, though he managed ultimately to fill six books with it, yet this was only done by drawing on every author of his acquaintance, and including a short history of the world. It is not a dull poem; in parts it is even very entertaining. The first canto is devoted to an exposition of the argument from design—is it possible that this universal frame should be without a mind? The sun rises and sets with perfect regularity; and consider, he says in a note, "s'il était plus ou moins grand, ou plus ou moins éloigné, nous serions brûlés ou glacés. Qui donc a réglé suivant nos besoins la grandeur, la distance et la marche de ce globe de feu?" He regards twilight as a peculiarly considerate arrangement, because "if the sun were to disappear all at once, we should be alarmed by the darkness". The animal kingdom rouses his admiration:

L'insecte nous appelle, et certain de son prix
Ose nous demander raison de nos mépris.
De secrètes beautés quel amas innombrable!
Plus l'auteur s'est caché, plus il est admirable.
Quoiqu'un fier éléphant, malgre l'énorme tour
Qui de son vaste dos me cache le contour,
S'avance sans ployer sous ce poids qu'il méprise,
Je ne t'admire point avec moins de surprise,
Toi qui vis dans la boue, et traînes ta prison,
Toi que souvent ma haine écrase avec raison,
Toi-même, insecte impur, quand tu me développes
Les étonnants ressorts de tes longs téléscopes. . .

One reader at least seems to have felt for the insect. The German translator, we are told, here exclaims in his note, "What has the poor snail done to M. Racine?" "Les dégâts qu'il fait dans nos jardins justifient ma haine; mais, quoique odieux, sa machine est admirable."

He goes on from natural history to anatomy, the circulation of the blood, etc., asks himself:

Est-ce moi qui préside au maintien de ces lois?

and decides in the negative. That is the first book.

The next is a discussion of philosophy as a substitute for religion. He begins with a summary of his earliest recollections, drawn chiefly from St. Augustine, goes on to deplore the human situation in the words of Pascal, and is presently shocked into topicality by a remembrance of the *Essay on Man.*

Sans doute qu'à ces mots, des bords de la Tamise,
Quelque abstrait raisonneur, qui ne se plaint de rien,
Dans son flegme anglican répondra, Tout est bien.

It is pleasant to hear the stolid Louis talking of Pope's "flegme anglican"—a quality in the English poet which has escaped his countrymen. But Pope was hurt. The *Essay on Man* had already got him into difficulties on the other side of the Channel. He owed its ideas to Bolingbroke, and thought they were orthodox. As was to be expected, few readers of the poem knew better. "So little," says Dr. Johnson, "was any evil tendency discovered, that as innocence is unsuspicious, many read it for a manual of piety." Its misfortunes began with its translation into French. It was at once pounced on by a Swiss professor, and exposed as unchristian. Pope was wounded by this, he was even alarmed, "he began to doubt the tendency of his own work". Every attack on it increased his agitation, and his anxiety to justify himself. The poem had a great vogue in France: Louis, like everyone else, read it in the translation, and he had been too carefully educated not to see through it at once. His insinuations drew from Pope a pained letter, in which he deprecated the charge of irreligion, and took what no doubt appeared to him the safe course of laying all false doctrines on the head of the translator, whose blunders, he said, had been innumerable. Louis accepted the explanation, and apologised. But truth is great and will prevail. Some years later he learnt English, had the curiosity to read the *Essay on Man* for himself, and at once withdrew the apology. Voltaire, however, tells the story in another way.

Writing on *La Religion* after Louis's death, he says:

"Louis Racine attacks, in this poem, the maxim of Lords Shaftesbury and Bolingbroke, 'Whatever is, is right'; the maxim so admirably illustrated by Pope. Racine as a Jansenist believed, upon the contrary, that almost all that is, is wrong; he accused Pope of irreligion. Pope was the son of a papist; that is the name given to Roman Catholics in England. Educated in the Catholic religion, which he ridiculed in some of his epistles, he nevertheless declined changing it, though a philosopher; or rather, he was philosopher enough to consider the change immaterial. He was piqued by Racine's accusations. Ramsay undertook to reconcile them. He was a Scotchman of the clan of Ramsay, whose name he had assumed, as is the custom in that country. He had settled in France, and attached himself to the illustrious Fénelon. . . . He formed the design of writing a letter to Louis Racine under the name of Pope, in which the latter should seem to justify himself. . . . I had lived with Pope an entire year, and knew him to be incapable of writing in French, for he could not speak a word of our language, nor even read our authors without difficulty; and this was known all over England. I therefore apprised Louis Racine that the letter was from Ramsay and not from Pope; I wished to make him sensible of the absurdity of this deception."

Louis was evidently not convinced, and indeed

the argument loses a good deal of its force from the fact that Pope's letter is in English.

Having dispatched the *Essay on Man*, he gets on with the discussion. The soul, doubtless, is immortal:

> Vous qui nous remplissez de vos douces manies,
> Poètes enchanteurs, adorables génies,
> Virgile, qui d'Homère appris à nous charmer,
> Boileau, Corneille, *et toi que je n'ose nommer*,
> Vos esprits n'étaient-ils qu'étincelles légères,
> Que rapides clartés et vapeurs passagères?

The poet "qu'il n'ose nommer" is never out of his mouth for long; he could not get over being the son of Jean Racine.

In short, the consolations of philosophy are rejected; and in his next book he embarks on the history of the world. This lasts him for two cantos. In Book Five he tackles the progress of science. His intention was to demonstrate the imbecility of the intellect, but his enthusiasm for its recent conquests rather led him astray. He tried in vain to take a high tone about Columbus:

> Si longtemps sur sa feuille attaché dans un coin,
> Par quel effort l'insecte a-t-il rampé si loin?

Galileo was worse. Here he lifted a long passage from Fontenelle's *Pluralité des Mondes*, and added a conclusion even warmer than the original:

> En vain l'inquisiteur croit entendre un blasphème,
> Et six ans de prison forcent au repentir
> D'un système effrayant l'infortuné martyr:
> La terre, nuit et jour à sa marche fidèle,
> Emporte Galilée et son juge avec elle.

It might have come out of a tirade against ecclesiastical tyranny. But Descartes finished him. Here he gave up all show of coolness. Thought had been enslaved, he says, for hundreds of years by the shade of Aristotle:

> Rassurons-nous, pourtant. Le jour commence à naître.
> Nous allons tous penser, Descartes va paraître.

Here patriotism reinforces scientific zeal:

> Si la France n'eût point produit cette lumière,
> Londres de son Newton ne serait pas si fière.

But as both Newton and Descartes were occasionally wrong, it follows that the human mind should not attempt to pass the limits assigned by God to its curiosity.

He had proved his religion to be sound; he had nothing left but to prove it desirable. This he does in the last book by means of a series of quotations from the Latin authors advocating virtue. He then complains of the decay of faith, and introduces a really dignified exhortation to religious tolerance which reminds one that he was a contemporary of Voltaire:

> Dieu de paix, que de sang a coulé sous ton nom!

Then announcing:

> A la fin de mes chants je me hâte d'atteindre,

he winds up with a description of the Day of Judgment. Many people will, on that day, get an unpleasant shock:

Lorsque le bonze étale en vain sa pénitence;
Quand le pâle bramine, après tant d'abstinence,
Apprend que, contre soi bizarrement cruel,
Il ne fit qu'avancer son supplice éternel;
De sa chute surpris, le musulman regrette
Le paradis charmant promis par son prophète.

And in short, the only safe thing is to be a Christian.

He was in a hurry to give this poem to the world, but first he consulted Jean-Baptiste on the project, and received a decided snub. Write by all means, said his brother in effect, but why publish? "Let us speak openly, as brothers ought. Do you expect to surpass, or even equal your father? . . . In your place I should be satisfied with cultivating for myself and my friends the talents heaven had bestowed on me, and with making them an innocent recreation." He went on to give his opinion of the poem with the same frankness. "You do not perhaps observe, that you have fallen into a snare which should always be shunned as far as possible; I mean the inclination to talk of oneself, which arises out of the petty vanity almost inseparable from our nature. . . . You entertain the reader continually with yourself, with your writings and with what posterity will say of them; and conclude by wishing them, in effect, eternal life. Suffer me to point out, that you attribute to yourself the most brilliant childhood that was ever heard of. When scarce out of the cradle, you have every kind of knowledge at your finger-ends; you have made yourself master of

poets, orators, philosophers, even the writings of Newton, notwithstanding it is said there are but three men in Europe capable of understanding him. In short, there is but one thing you do not know, that is your catechism. I write all this in jest, and because I am willing you should see that I am now pretty well acquainted with your work; although the last person to whom you have shown it, I doubt whether the others have been at equal pains to follow and unravel the thread, which your frequent digressions not seldom interrupt. There are many other things I would say to you, but I leave it to your good sense to find them out. It is the truth of religion, and not your skill in turning verses, which you have to prove. Is it the love of God which inspires your poem? then let Him be your only topic; and above all, shun the singular mixture of sacred and profane which is now seen in it throughout. I cannot urge this point too strongly. You may perhaps think me severe; I am sorry; but I must speak as I think. Write operas, I shall not criticise you, and shall be pleased with everything." And he concludes with the unkindest cut of all, advising his brother, if he *must* publish, not to do so without keeping and revising the poem "at least a year". Louis was hurt; but his respect for Jean-Baptiste was not so absolute as to make him submit, or even effect a single one of the changes recommended. His poem appeared without delay.

It was at once greeted by a pamphlet entitled:

Conseils à M. Racine, par un Amateur des belles-lettres. The production was anonymous, but every line of it announced Voltaire.

"In reading this poem, by the son of the illustrious Racine, I remarked some beauties; but I was sensible of a defect which prevails through the whole work: monotony. . . . What I desire from the author is more warmth, a greater wealth of imagery, and descriptions more striking.

"Now, I would have him interrogate eternal Wisdom, who should respond from her throne on high; now I would have the Word himself come down to earth to confound Mahomet, Confucius and Zoroaster, summoned from the abyss to hear: at another moment the abyss itself should open; how pleasing to descend, to question the sages of antiquity, and compel them to acknowledge that they knew not Wisdom. . . . A hundred images of this kind should command the attention of the reader, whom history wearies and dogma lulls asleep."

He then picks out one of the weakest arguments, analyses it, and adds:

"I direct the notice of M. Racine to this little instance, among several, because I doubt not an understanding like his will be sensible of the value of precision, and will engage him to correct these trifling blemishes in his poem, wherever he finds them. . . . An argument of the kind can serve only to expose our religion to the mockery of the deists who cover the earth.

"I take the freedom of urging him to make yet greater efforts, when he challenges comparison with other poets, ancient and modern, in his descriptions. For example, M. de Voltaire, in one of his poetical essays, has thus expressed himself."

Here follows a series of parallel passages from Louis and M. de Voltaire, arranged so as to convey a hint of unskilful plagiarism.

"I omit some other examples; nor will I stay to examine in detail those lines which the author cannot be dispensed from correcting; for I esteem him highly enough to suppose that he will discover them himself, or consult one of the academicians whose taste is the purest. M. Racine would appear to have been unwise in addressing himself to Rousseau for advice on a subject of this kind . . . his epistles prove that reasoning was not entirely congenial to his talents. He is for ever attacking that ancient sect, which attributed all to chance. This is to fight with shadows. The Christian's business is to attack on their own ground, but with the utmost mildness, those unbelievers who admit an omnipotent and just God, who has done only what is good, and who has given us the measure of knowledge and felicity proportioned to our nature; who never changes; who imprints in all hearts the natural law; who is and has always been the father of all men, not regarding one race with especial favour, nor turning from his other creatures in wrath; who has not endowed us with reason only to enforce

our belief of what reason condemns; who has not enlightened us for our destruction, etc. Such are the monstrous dogmas, the pernicious subtleties which it was his business to demolish."

Voltaire had been particularly stung by Louis's attacks on the deists; this little eulogy was his retaliation.

"I shall conclude by begging M. Racine, in the interest of his own fame, to indulge himself no more in invectives against his brother authors. It is a kind of rudeness no longer tolerated; gentlemen disprove it.

"I flatter myself that M. Racine will receive in charity observations which charity has dictated."

He did flatter himself. Sometime later Louis wrote to a friend: "No adverse criticisms of this poem have appeared, except one commonly ascribed to Voltaire; and that, indeed, is scarcely to be called criticism; it is a wretched little pamphlet, only distinguished by its malignity." He adds: "Though I thought I discerned M. de Voltaire by several circumstances, I ought not to believe he had the smallest share in it, since he has assured me of the contrary." It is easy to see how much confidence Voltaire's assurances commanded. The pamphlet was probably meant to deceive no one but Louis, but even Louis was not so simple as that.

Though *La Religion* had been so roughly handled by fraternal sympathy and undying friendship, the world at large was more polite. Louis's masterpiece

had a very fair success—not riotous, but a gratifying *succès d'estime*. It was translated into all kinds of languages except English; the author appears to have felt sore on this point. A few years after its publication he wrote: "Le Hollandais qui a entrepris le poème de la Religion me mande que sa traduction avance. Ce poème a eu deux traducteurs en Italie, un en Allemagne; on m'annonce une traduction espagnole: je ne crois pas en voir jamais une anglaise. Si j'avais fait un roman, je serais bientôt traduit à Londres." One did appear in time, however, and it is to be hoped he repented. After his death a critic described the poem as "an immortal work in which poetry is sustained by a divine force; in which truth, hung with its own adornments, shines without dazzling the eyes, enchants the reason without lulling it in bewitching dreams! God, the soul, revelation, the Redeemer, the sacred mysteries, the Christian morality—how the poet soars to the height of these sublime objects! Ever the same and ever new in his various yet unchanging course, he leads us on from marvel to marvel. What liveliness, what truth in his descriptions! What art in his colouring! It is the brush of Virgil and of Homer; or, to speak truer, it is the flame that kindled Moses, David and the prophets." It is fair to add that this rhapsody occurs in the eulogy of L. Racine pronounced before the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, of which he had been a member.

Louis's shorter pieces are not unreadable, and

some of his sacred odes are even good. If he had been born later; if he had breathed the more congenial air of the romantic movement, he might have been an engaging minor elegiac poet, still read. Or, with the support of his father's memory removed, he might not have been a poet at all.

He was a critic, too. During his exile he produced a substantial volume of *Réflexions sur la poésie*. It is a moral little work. "I shall begin," he says, "by attempting to conciliate those respectable persons who condemn poetry as immoral, or frivolous at the best." And he admits there is a great deal of truth in their remarks. Modern literature is shocking.

"Que dirait Cicéron s'il se trouvait parmi nous à ce spectacle où l'on exécute en musique une bizarre espèce de tragédie; et si, après avoir entendu répéter tant de fois que la jeunesse doit profiter du printemps, et que la sagesse est ennuyeuse, il voyait enfin danser des vieillards, chantant ces paroles si peu convenables à l'âge des réflexions?

Pour le peu de bon temps qui nous reste,
Rien n'est si funeste
Qu'un noir chagrin. . . .

Ce serait bien alors que, étonné d'entendre à tout âge prêcher la même morale, il s'écrierait, 'O praeclaram emendatricem vitae Poeticam!' 'O la belle réformatrice des mœurs que la poésie!' "

But all poets are not like this. "On peut reprocher de grands défauts à Milton, mais on n'a rien à lui reprocher sur les mœurs." In fact there is no harm

in poetry as such; "on peut perdre d'agréables heures dans la lecture des poésies innocentes". Indeed, the best poets are positively improving. The secrets of their art, therefore, may be worth inquiring into. The results of his own inquiries are as follows:

Il ne suffit pas d'imiter la nature.
La beauté n'est que l'imitation de la nature.
La beauté poétique consiste dans le vrai de l'imitation,
L'imitation n'est point essentielle à la poésie.
On n'appelle beauté que ce qui plaît.

He devotes some space to an animated refutation of Fontenelle. That distinguished man had written a great deal of verse in his time, because it was expected; but the more poetry he wrote, the less he could see why people liked it. At last he hit on the solution; what gratified the reader in metrical compositions was his sense of the *difficulté vaincue*. It was just like tight-rope walking. No one would be enchanted with the movements of a tight-rope walker if he walked on the ground; but the difficulty overcome in walking on a rope excited just admiration. That being so, he could not listen without annoyance when poets began to talk of the bondage of rhyme, and seriously to consider breaking loose from it. It was too clearly cheating. "C'est au public à voir s'il veut donner ses louanges à un prix plus bas qu'il ne faisait. Les poètes ont raison de tâcher d'obtenir de lui cette grâce; mais il aura encore plus raison de la refuser." Louis, a sincere poet if a minor

one, makes tolerably short work of this reasoning. He has some curious observations by the way. There is, he says, a difficulty in estimating the value of poetical works which does not present itself with the other arts. "No one, even if he is not a connoisseur, ever takes a bad picture for a good one." The reason of this enviable certainty is the no less enviable conviction that a painter's business is to imitate objects. We all know a table when we see it. In all arts, however, the masters are soon recognised. Homer is the chief poet, and Virgil next. In painting, no one will deny the first place to Raphael, or the second to Rubens. In music, there is Lully—without, apparently, even a bad second. Their successors have only to imitate them, and they cannot go far wrong.

His favourite author is never mentioned by name. Jean Racine was his glory, and after God his perpetual theme. The *Réflexions sur la poésie* are full of him. And Louis's next book was devoted to him entirely. The son had long projected a life of his father, and now it was for his own son's edification that the work was specially designed. It would have been hard to find a historian so pious, or so ill-informed; everything of interest had been carefully kept from him by those who knew. Of course, in his researches, which were minute, he had come across a good many stories about la du Parc, and la Champmeslé, and so on, which might have distressed him; but his father's old friends assured him these were

ill-natured rumours with no truth in them at all. Some parts of Jean Racine's life, indeed, were harder to explain away, and Louis could not deny that the sheep, in his youth, had strayed a long way from the religious fold; still, rightly considered, what was this truancy but a foil for the precious jewel of his home-return? Of what befell the truant in his wanderings his son has very little to say. When scandalous rumours had been rejected the material was thin and imperfectly edifying. So this period is represented by an anecdote or two, in which Jean Racine does not always figure. For instance, there had been a little dinner one evening at Molière's villa near Paris. After dinner "the wine brought on a deep discourse among the guests; and their reflections on the miseries of life, and on the Greek maxim that the first happiness is not to be born, the second to quit this world as soon as possible, led them to the heroic resolution of throwing themselves immediately into the river. Thither they went accordingly; it was not far off. Then Molière represented to them that an action so sublime ought not to be buried in darkness, but was worthy of being performed in the light of day. They paused, and, looking at each other, observed, He is right; and Chapelle added: 'Yes, gentlemen, we will drown ourselves to-morrow morning; and in the meantime, let us go back and finish the wine.' The next day changed their views, and they judged it proper to endure the miseries of life a while

longer." Louis concludes: "Happily my father was not present."

He was glad to get back to an era of his father's life which would bear closer scrutiny. The return to Port-Royal is feelingly described, and the moral is not left to the imagination. From this point it is all plain sailing; pious enthusiasm alternating with comic relief, for which perhaps Louis's was not quite the hand. Boileau looms very large and is victimised whole-heartedly, whereas Louis cannot tell stories against his father without a filial twinge. The story of their appointment as historiographers-royal makes pleasant reading; they took their duties very seriously, and set about them most methodically:

"Les deux poètes, résolus de ne plus l'être, ne songèrent qu'à devenir historiens; et pour s'en rendre capables, ils passèrent d'abord beaucoup de temps à se mettre au fait et de l'Histoire générale de France, et de l'Histoire particulière du règne qu'ils avaient à écrire. Mon père, pour se mettre ses devoirs devant les yeux, fit une espèce d'extrait du Traité de Lucien, sur la manière d'écrire l'histoire. . . . Il fit ensuite des extraits de Mezerai et de Vittorio Siri."

Bouvard and Pécuchet could not have done better.

The two poets were made to follow the army and witness the exploits they were to describe. Mme. de Scudéry remarked afterwards: "Je crois que la peur les a empêchés de rien voir", and indeed they seem to have made no pretence of valour. Boileau,

by Jean Racine's admission, was the more courageous of the two; but both were excessively glad to be home again. They had spent most of their time dazed and stunned, covered with mud and dropping with fatigue, the butt of all the officers, who were continually laying traps for them, into which they always fell. Then the King would be entertained with the story in the evening. It is strange to think what Jean Racine, sensitive and resentful as he was, gratefully stood in the King's service. Louis for all his mildness would not have courted such humiliation; it was the penalty of the *arriviste*.

If the son had much idea of his father's character, he does not obtrude it in the *Life*. Jean Racine was touchy and self-tormenting; when he had domestic worries he would cry out in despair: "Why did not I become a Carthusian? I should have had peace then." And that is about all. Seldom, of course, have two men been more unlike; Louis inheriting only a fragment of his father's soul—a little of his sensibility, a little of his bitterness and black humour, but softened into the most placid, pensive melancholy.

The *Life* also was a work of exile; but the exile was drawing to a close. When Louis left Paris, he had flattered himself that it was not for long. The protection of Cardinal Fleury, which had obtained him this employment, was to do better for him presently. But he had no more notion of pushing his way than his patrons of being serviceable without

pushing; Cardinal Fleury had not moved; and Louis had now been a kind of commercial traveller in Provence for twenty-five years. But for his marriage he would very likely have died at his post; but his wife had a moderate fortune, his own had been gradually increased by the death of his brother and sisters, and now at last he felt he might resume his liberty. The day he left Provence must have been the happiest of his life; or did he feel, as he rolled on his belated way to Paris, too conscious of all the wasted years? He returned, at any rate, enriched with a wife and children, of whom he was fond, especially of the son, his only son, a boy of the most amiable character and of great promise, whom he was over-educating in the hope that he would resemble his grandfather.

He now settled down to pass the evening of life congenially, among his books and his friends. The latter, as may be imagined, were worthy religious men who belonged like himself, in spirit if not in years, to the preceding age, and were as remote from the eighteenth century as possible. There must have been a vast number of these people going quietly about their business and devotions throughout the wicked days of the Regent, and Louis XV., and Fontenelle, and Voltaire; they must have been a majority even among the cultured, though one is inclined to forget it. They were the journeymen of arts and letters, modest, pious, hard-working, and not infrequently distinguished; one of Louis's inti-

mates, for example, was Le Franc de Pompignan, the poet pursued with so much virulence by Voltaire. He was a true poet for all that, and an excellent man; indeed, intimacy with Louis was a certificate of character. One possible exception softens the fact. He liked, pitied and defended J. B. Rousseau when the aged and certainly not blameless poet was in exile and detestation for a crime of which he persisted in declaring himself innocent. Louis believed him; but in any case he thought the punishment excessive. "Je trouve bien dur de refuser à un homme de son âge la douceur de mourir dans sa patrie. On y laisse bien vivre Voltaire." Voltaire was one of the loftiest in denouncing the culprit. After Rousseau's death the persecution continued, and Louis, defending his friend openly and warmly, attracted some of it to himself. But the unfortunate had always a charm for him, and the innocent unfortunate were irresistible.

His other friends were not suspect. Among these not unhappy people he read, wrote and talked for the next ten years, in a leisure that must have been delicious to him, undisturbed by any event of importance. He edited his father's works, and composed a treatise on the drama chiefly designed to enforce their excellence; it was by a good deal the dullest work that ever came from his pen. He superintended his son's education, which was going on well. He attended the meetings of the Académie des Inscriptions; he gardened; he collected engravings. One more considerable undertaking he had in hand.

Years ago he had read the first French translation of *Paradise Lost*, and it had been on his mind ever since: in this abundance of leisure he resolved to make a new and more exact version of it. He set about it with his usual thoroughness; learnt English on purpose; composed a treatise on epic poetry, and a discourse on *Paradise Lost*. The whole thing appeared in 1755.

It was his last work. That year put the cruellest possible end to his hopes and interests. His son was then twenty-two years old, of an age to choose a profession, and likely to do well in any profession he chose. He was intelligent, accomplished, with a prodigious memory, and apparently a charming disposition; he had many friends, and they all expected great things from him. The question was, What was he to do? On one point Louis was firm; he was not to enter the government service. "It is true," he had written to his wife more than ten years before, "that I have passed my own life in that employment, because, as I was without fortune, I was obliged to take what unfriendly patrons gave me; but I have this consolation, my son will never be reduced to that melancholy obligation. You are his mother; it will therefore be in his power to choose a different pursuit." The young man, when he was able to judge for himself, agreed heartily. At last it was decided that he should go abroad and seek a fortune "pure", as he said, "of all iniquity". In the year 1755 he was at Cadiz. It was the year of the great Lisbon

earthquake; a fatal period to many more than poor Louis and his family. The young man was one day driving along the shore in a post-chaise, on his way to a wedding. Suddenly the sea rose out of its bed; a terrific tidal wave swept the unhappy Hippolytus with his chariot to destruction. That was the end of his father's literary career.

Louis was submissive under the blow; but he never recovered from it. His son's death appeared to him in the light of a judgment on his own worldliness. In a note to the new edition of *La Religion* which was completed the next year, he wrote: "The blessing God has accorded to this work, in an age when impiety is triumphant, had engaged me to turn my attention to it once more. . . . I have made several additions; and should perhaps have made yet more, had I not been torn from it by one of those afflictions, which religion only can console. . . . I had a son, dear to me, not because he was my only one, but because he promised much. . . . God gave him to me, and God has taken him away. Yes, God has taken him, and by such an unforeseen disaster as renders death terrible at any age, but above all in the age of the passions. Yet my son's virtue, the goodness of his heart, the rectitude of his notions, the purity of his life, all contribute to my hope that God has taken him to His mercy; and that it is I whom He has struck by this great blow, so that, finding myself alone, I should be His only, and pass the remainder of my days imploring the mercy

for myself that I have not deserved by a life so little in conformity with the great truths which from my youth I had the boldness to announce in my poetry." Accordingly, he resolved to dedicate himself to penance entirely. He sold his library, keeping only a few books of devotion. He sold his collection of engravings, in which he had taken pride. He renounced all his worldly studies for ever—"vellem ab initio", he could say, he believed sincerely. The garden in the Faubourg St. Denis was now his only pleasure; and here he spent a good deal of time working and meditating, in the continual shadow of his loss. We have an account by Delille, a future translator of Milton, but then a very young man, just embarked on his version of the *Georgics*, of a visit he paid to this retreat:

"Je le trouvai dans un cabinet au fond du jardin, seul avec son chien, qu'il paraissait aimer extrêmement. . . . Cette entrevue, cette retraite modeste, ce cabinet, où ma jeune imagination croyait voir rassemblés la piété tendre, la poésie chaste et religieuse, la philosophie sans faste, la paternité malheureuse mais résignée, enfin le reste vénérable d'une illustre famille prête à s'éteindre faute d'héritiers, mais dont le nom ne mourra jamais, m'ont laissé une impression forte et durable. Je partis plein d'ardeur et de joie, croyant avoir entendu non seulement la voix du chantre de la religion, mais quelques accents de l'auteur *d'Athalie*."

It must be owned that his young imagination was

under good control, and saw nothing but what was pretty evidently before it. Louis had encouraged the young poet, as he liked to do.

He survived his son's loss only a few years, dying in 1763, the youngest and last of Jean Racine's children. The name soon died likewise. His widow was the last to bear it.

Voltaire summed up Louis's poetry neatly if inaccurately in his *Siècle de Louis XIV*. "Racine (Louis), fils de l'immortel Jean Racine, a marché sur les traces de son père, mais dans un sentier plus étroit, et moins fait pour les Muses. Il entendait la mécanique des vers aussi bien que son père, mais il n'en avait ni l'âme ni les grâces: il manquait d'ailleurs d'invention et d'imagination. Janséniste comme son père, il ne fit des vers que pour le jansénisme. On en trouve de très beaux dans le poème de la Grâce, et dans celui de la Religion, ouvrage trop didactique et trop monotone, copié des Pensées de Pascal, mais rempli de beaux détails." It may almost be assumed that he thought better of him; certainly the world at large thought better. His poetical reputation in his own day was considerable, and it is not difficult to see why. He had thoroughly mastered the literary idiom, not of his time exactly, but of a time slightly earlier, and in that—in the fact that he was always a little late—lies, perhaps, the secret of his success. An age takes character from its more advanced representatives, if there is a reasonable number of them; it takes character, naturally,

from its novel aspects. In that sense it is true and obvious that the eighteenth century was irreligious, revolutionary, "philosophical". But it is impossible that it should have been strictly true of the majority, even of the cultured majority; and to that, as has been said, Louis belonged. He is not advanced, certainly, nor is he exactly retrograde. He does not keep pace with the march of mind, but neither has he lost sight of it. Morally and religiously he is conservative without hesitation, and that ensures him a large audience. Aesthetically he is conservative; so was Voltaire. But the progress of science is rather a different thing; there one must keep up with the time, or at any rate a few paces in the rear of it. Facts make their way and bring their attitudes along with them. Louis could not, though he wished it, quote Fontenelle and still think like St. Augustine. His poem, "imitated from the *Pensées of Pascal*", would have made Pascal shudder. To give atheists, says the great apologist, discussing the existence of God, "pour toute preuve de ce grand et important sujet, le cours de la lune et des planètes, c'est leur donner sujet de croire que les preuves de notre religion sont bien faibles, et je vois par raison et par expérience que rien n'est plus propre à leur en faire naître le mépris." But if the argument from design scarcely appealed to the more rigorous minds of the Grand Siècle, the Romantics adored it. "Ces soleils," says Chateaubriand, "qui sont la grande évidence de l'existence de Dieu." Romantic piety spreads, senti-

mentalises, sheds a dogma on every page; it is nothing but decay. With Lamartine, of course, the disintegration is complete; line after line of him might have been written by Louis, and the intervening lines are Pope's *Essay on Man* almost word for word. And this begins in the pages of *La Religion*; you can see it beginning. It was not for nothing that Chateaubriand read, quoted, imitated him. No writer more impresses one with the poverty and continuity of human ideas, and at the same time with the reality of the difference between one age and the next.

"Le Paradis Perdu," said Voltaire in his essay on *Epic Poetry*, "fut longtemps négligé à Londres, et Milton mourut sans se douter qu'il aurait un jour de la réputation. Ce fut le Lord Sommers et le Dr. Atterbury, depuis Évêque de Rochester, qui voulurent enfin que l'Angleterre eût un Poème épique. Leur suffrage entraîna plusieurs depuis: le célèbre M. Addison écrivit en forme pour prouver que ce Poème égalait ceux de Virgile et d'Homère: les Anglais commencèrent à se le persuader, et la réputation de Milton fut fixée."

In the first year of the nineteenth century, Chateaubriand thus related the same circumstances:

"Milton n'était plus; on ne le connaissait pas: son génie, sorti du tombeau comme une ombre, vint demander au monde pourquoi on l'ignorait sur la terre. Étonné, on regarda ces grands Mânes. . . . La

vision éclatante et majestueuse fit d'abord baisser les yeux; puis on se prosterna et on adora."

As will be seen, there has been some change of tone.

This revelation of buried genius, Chateaubriand continues, gave rise to an increasing curiosity about Milton on the Continent: questions were asked. "Bayle commença, et s'enquit des *faits touchants la taille et la mine de Milton*: cette mine-là était fière, et valait bien celle d'un roi."

Chateaubriand's dramatic sense misled him. Milton was, indeed, honoured with a longish article in Bayle's *Dictionary*, which appeared first in 1697, and he is the only English poet mentioned there; but he owed the distinction entirely to his activities as a regicide. His political writings had earned him abroad an instant though temporary notoriety, which was still flickering when the *Dictionary* came out. But Bayle had very little notion of poetry as such, and certainly none of English poetry. Milton's poetical works are thus dismissed at the extreme end of the article:

"Il aimait la poésie, et il y a plusieurs de ses poèmes, tant en Latin qu'en Anglais, qui ont vu le jour, soit pendant sa vie, soit après sa mort."

In a later footnote he adds, what he had evidently since found out, that *Paradise Lost* "passe pour l'un des plus beaux ouvrages de poésie que l'on ait vu en Anglais". But he gave Milton's life in some detail, the whole picturesque episode of his quarrel with his first wife, and all the facts about his *mine* and his

taille, for he was an inveterate gossip. Milton had thus a good start in France. It is better to be known as a daring rebel, a regicide, with monstrous views and an amusing personal history, than to come before the public solely as the author of an unrhymed epic in a foreign tongue, in a harsh and obscure style, and on a subject which the French, as we learn from more than one critic, persistently regarded as facetious. Even with those accidental advantages, the poem made its way rather slowly. But it did, from this point creep steadily into notice.

The first extensive notice of Milton after Bayle's, occurred in the *Mémoires de Trévoux* for 1710. The occasion of it was a review of Toland's *Life*, which had appeared more than ten years earlier.

"The Book, of which we are about to give an account, has been in print some years; it came into our hands, however, but a short time ago. The Author, or rather the Compiler, is sufficiently notorious for the seditious and impious works he has given to the world under the specious pretext of liberty: he has declared himself equally the enemy of God and Government. It was he who composed the *Anglia Libera*, a seditious work if ever there was one, and which overthrows the fundamental laws of the State of England. This writer lacked only a hero who should have practised the detestable maxims in which his works abound. John Milton presented himself as a subject worthy of his pen; he has written his life and his apology."

He then briefly relates the life of Milton up to the outbreak of the Civil War: from that point he becomes more animated.

"Until this moment Milton's impious and seditious character had appeared only in private conversations. In 1641 he dropped his mask, and began to write in a violent and satirical manner against the Anglican Church. . . . In 1643 he married a young lady of the province of Oxford, named Mary Powel: this young woman, unable to endure her husband's eccentric and imperious temper, quitted him at the end of a month. Milton's resentment of this behaviour was such that he resolved to divorce her and marry another. He wrote, within the space of two years, three treatises to prove that the laws of marriage are no longer binding than while the man is pleased with his wife; these scandalous pamphlets made a great stir in England. Honest men were as much shocked as libertines appeared satisfied with them. . . .

"When Charles I. had been sacrificed, in 1648, to the fury of the factionaries, Milton at once took up the pen and wrote a book entitled *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, an abominable work, which proves at once the impiety, the perfidy and the passion of this Writer. . . .

"Saumaise's book, entitled *Defensio Regia*, appeared in 1649. Milton, who was fertile in abuse and calumnies, replied by another book under the title, *Defensio pro Populo Anglicano*. This is unquestion-

ably one of the most seditious pamphlets that was ever printed. The Author was nevertheless rewarded by a present of 1000 pounds sterling. This book, however, had not the same success in other countries; for it was publicly burned by order of the magistrate in Paris and in Toulouse. . . .

"Some time after, he completed the celebrated poem entitled *Paradise Lost*. This work, though highly seditious, none the less obtained great applause from all England. Milton, swollen with success, resolved to publish *Paradise Regained*: but the second poem is greatly inferior to the first, as well in the design as the expression.

"As for the *History of Britain*, he continued it only as far as the Conquest. It is a tedious rhapsody of fables and abuse and not worth reading.

"We will say nothing of several other works of Milton: let it suffice to observe that all his works, despite the seditious maxims they contain, have been printed in London in three folio volumes.

"In 1674 Milton, crushed by poverty and disease, hated and despised by all honest men, died of the gout and was buried in the Church of St. Giles. We must here allow that he had a quick wit, a lively imagination, an excellent memory. He was a poet, an orator and a historian. He had a fair acquaintance with the Greek and Latin tongues; and so much facility in writing that in the space of twenty years he published nearly thirty-five different works. His

books, however, are the productions rather of a disordered imagination than of a solid understanding. As for his religion, he had never any. Protestant, Presbyterian, Socinian, Anabaptist, all appeared to him so indifferent that he never attached himself to any sect and died an atheist."

The idea that Milton was an infidel died hard in France, and no wonder. Voltaire probably did something to undermine it; he never gave the English poet credit for intelligence enough to be irreligious. It is not clear that the writer of this article ever attempted actually to read Milton's poems, either those mentioned or the others which, in spite of their seditious maxims, he passes over. Indeed, Milton was unlikely to have much of an audience in France till someone should see fit to translate him; and, conversely, a translation seemed improbable until an audience for it should be known to exist. The French translation of the *Spectator* omitted Addison's essays on *Paradise Lost* on the ground that there was no French version of the poem and probably never would be. But seven years after the unpromising article in the *Mémoires de Trévoux*, Milton's poetry received serious attention in another periodical. This was the *Journal Littéraire*, which published, in 1717, a Dissertation upon English Poetry:

"In this kind of verse"—blank verse—"appeared the masterpiece of the English in Epic. They prize it extraordinarily, and it must be allowed that the poem, taken in general, is worthy of the admiration

and respect with which it has always been honoured. Certainly, on a first consideration of the subject, one would conclude this work to proceed rather from Bedlam than from the study of a man remarkable for his good sense; but when one remarks the manner in which the poem is treated, one is obliged to abandon this astonishment, so injurious to the author, in favour of astonishment at the skill with which he has carried out a design so daring and so inconceivable. His subject is the loss of Eden, of which the Holy Scripture tells us so little, that it appears almost impossible, without distorting it, to dignify it by poetical ornaments. And this grave disadvantage must be present through the whole work. Yet one is hardly sensible of it, being distracted by continual beauties, which occupy the mind so entirely that it can attend to nothing else. . . . We presume the Reader will be glad to see a brief abstract of so extraordinary a Poem."

The abstract follows. The author, like almost all succeeding French critics, is more impressed with the plan than with the poetry of *Paradise Lost*, but the scenes in Eden, he says, are really enchanting. "Ce dernier article fait mieux sentir, à mon avis, le génie merveilleux de M. Milton, que tout le reste de son poème." This also is to be the general opinion; and "génie merveilleux" is a stronger term than has been used yet. He does not fail, however, to deplore the unnecessary warmth with which Milton has described the first effects of the Fall.

"The alteration in the love of our first parents seems but imperfectly suited to a poem of this kind; the author describes it in so natural a manner that he records even the lassitude which followed their embraces, after delineating with the utmost frankness the desires and transports which preceded it; a picture more proper to excite like desires than to arouse pity and horror at the effect of the first sin." On this point eighteenth-century France continued to feel strongly.

Perhaps the *Journal Littéraire* had some effect; but it was another ten years before things began to move again. Then they began in earnest. Voltaire appears on the scene.

When Voltaire went to England it was a very foreign country indeed—almost virgin soil. He prepared to annex it. He traversed the whole surface of art, science and politics at great speed. He learnt the language. As a final display of virtuosity, and bid for attention, he decided to write in it.

Considering his short acquaintance with English, he did it very well; stiffly indeed—it cramped his style to a degree—but creditably all the same. His preoccupation with the *Henriade* suggested Epic Poetry as a subject.

He had been hearing a great deal about Milton since his arrival in England. Milton was the fashion. One conversation is recorded in which he maintained stoutly against a group of Englishmen, of whom Young was one, that the allegorical episode

of Sin and Death disfigured the poem. Young put an end to the dispute by remarking impromptu:

> You are so witty, profligate and thin,
> At once we think you Milton, Death and Sin.

Of course, Voltaire ought to have hated Milton. There is plenty of later evidence that he did hate him. But at the moment he seems to have been dazzled. Milton was so odd: so extremely English: and then he was a novelty, a sensation, a field, Voltaire must immediately have realised, in which few—perhaps he really thought no—Frenchmen had preceded him. For undoubtedly he already saw himself responsible for England: taking his seat upon the intellectual throne and lucidly explaining the island to his countrymen. And, perhaps, writing in England and in English, he thought it suitable to flatter the prejudices of his audience a little. At any rate, in his *Essay upon the Epic Poetry of the European Nations from Homer down to Milton*, he enlarges on the merits of *Paradise Lost* almost with rapture.

"If the difference of Genius between Nation and Nation ever appeared in its full light 'tis in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

"The French answer with a scornful smile when they are told there is in England an Epick Poem, the subject whereof is the devil fighting against God, and Adam and Eve eating an apple at the persuasion of a snake. . . . If those who have the highest respect for the mysteries of the Christian Religion, and who

are struck with awe at some parts of it, yet cannot forbear now and then making free with the Devil, the Serpent, the frailty of our first parents, the rib which Adam was robbed of, and the like, it seems a very hard task for a profane poet to endeavour to remove those shadows of ridicule. . . .

"What Milton so boldly undertook, he performed with a superior strength of judgment, and with an imagination productive of beauties not dreamed of before him. The Meanness (if there is any) of some parts of the subject is lost in the immensity of the poetical invention. There is something above the reach of human forces to have attempted the creation without Bombast, to have described the gluttony and curiosity of a woman without flatness, to have brought probability and reason amidst the hurry of imaginary things belonging to another world, and as far remote from the limits of our notions as they are from our earth; in short, to force the reader to say to himself, If God, if the angels, if Satan would speak, I believe they would speak as they do in Milton."

It all sounds rather as if he were repeating a lesson. But perhaps that was only the language.

"*The Paradise Lost*" (he always kept the article in referring to it) "is the only poem wherein are to be found, in a perfect degree, that Uniformity which satisfies the mind, and that variety which pleases the imagination: all its episodes being necessary lines, which aim at the centre of a perfect circle. Where is

the Nation who would not be pleased with the interview of Adam and the angel? With the Mountain of Vision, with the bold Strokes which make up the relentless, undaunted and sly character of Satan? But above all, with that sublime Wisdom which Milton exerts, whenever he dares to describe God, and to make Him speak? He seems indeed to draw the picture of the Almighty, as like as human nature can reach to, through the mortal dust in which we are clouded."

It does sound very odd.

In describing Adam and Eve: "He soars not above Human, but above corrupt nature; and as there is no instance of such love, there is none of such poetry.

"How then it came to pass that the *Paradise Lost* had been so long neglected (nay, almost unknown) in England . . . is a Thing which I cannot reconcile, neither with the temper, nor with the genius, of the English Nation."

He defended Milton's digressions, chiefly perhaps for the sake of reflecting on another poet whom he found even more uncongenial:

"'Tis strange that Homer is commended by the critics for his comparing Ajax to an ass pelted away with stones by some children, Ulysses to a Pudding, the Council-Board of Priam to Grasshoppers: 'Tis strange, I say, that they defend so clamorously those similes, tho' never so foreign to the purpose, and will not allow the natural reflections, the noble

digressions of Milton, tho' never so closely linked to the subject."

Then follows a list of things that "might" be objected to in Milton, things that "French critics could not like": the Sin and Death episode is gently complained of, and so on.

"In case these Exceptions are just, the severest critic must however confess, there are perfections enough in Milton to attone for all his defects."

To crown it all, he styles *Paradise Lost* "the noblest work which human Imagination hath ever attempted".

It would be interesting to know how much of this he really meant. Certainly not all: probably a good deal. For in later life, when he never mentioned Milton without a gibe and tried earnestly, but too late, to dissuade people from reading him, he did not, as he easily might, attempt to explain away the indiscretion of 1727 by representing it as a polite softening of his real views. The attitude he took up was that he had always said the same. He had two reasons to repent of his enthusiasm for *Paradise Lost*. In the first place, he became more and more conscious that he had written an epic himself. The longer it had been in print, the greater was his anxiety lest it should cease to be talked about. The growing interest in Milton, the buzz of conversation about Milton's poem, irritated him extremely: all the more because he had helped to provoke it. He turned on Shakespeare in the same way, as a

rival dramatist. The second reason was more urgent. Only a few months after the essay, there appeared a French version of *Paradise Lost*, by Dupré de St. Maur. Everybody read it, and all began to air their own views on the author of the poem. Voltaire's elegant literary monopoly had slipped through his fingers.

It was irritating, no doubt; but he took it badly. He would not give up the credit of having discovered Milton, and henceforth he always combined it with the view that Milton was a humbug. Thanks to his long life and his astounding pertinacity, he gained the first point with the French public, though he never succeeded in carrying the second. He repeated over and over again, in his own person and anonymously, that Milton's name had never been heard in France till he mentioned it; concluding with broad hints that but for him St. Maur's translation would never have been projected. People at length assimilated this information; but Milton's fame continued to grow and his translators to multiply.

St. Maur's version was amazingly popular; it became the literary topic of the moment, and it went into ten editions in the course of the eighteenth century. It was in prose; it was free, elegant and not too Miltonic. It softened the blow. It took the chill off, and the plunge became actually an agreeable shock. The new poet was valued for his very strangeness. They lost, of course, all Milton's style, but then they had Addison's word for it (his essays on

Paradise Lost were included in the volume) that most people disliked the style: and, in any case, English was a language notoriously harsh and crude, from which little could be expected. But the plan of the work was much admired. It comes out, indeed, extraordinarily in the French prose translations; the English reader feels that he is for the first time realising what *Paradise Lost* is *about*. From that moment everyone read and talked about Milton, and a good many people wrote about him. In 1730 appeared an anonymous translation of *Paradise Regained*, with *Lycidas*, *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, and the *Nativity Ode*. The Abbé Mareuil was responsible for this abominable little work, which it is impossible to read without a shudder. The moment might have been thought auspicious, but the book was received in dead silence, and no wonder. This is part of his attempt at the *Nativity Ode*:

> "L'Emmanuel paraît sur la terre. Heureux Hiver, tu l'as vu naître. Cruel, adoucis tes rigueurs. Hélas! ce Dieu enfant n'a qu'une crèche pour berceau. La nature dépouillée des ornements de sa gaieté sympathise en quelque sorte avec le dénûment de son maître. A peine le Soleil daigne-t-il la regarder d'un œil gracieux. . . .
>
> "Les vents dans l'étonnement retinrent leur haleine, les fleuves modérèrent l'impétuosité de leurs cours, et coulèrent doucement vers l'océan, qui oublia ses fureurs, pour inviter les alcyons à faire leurs nids sur les eaux. . . .

"Le dragon de l'abîme sent approcher sa ruine, il le sent, et il en frémit d'horreur. Les démons allarmés fuyent son aspect. C'est ainsi qu'au lever du soleil les ténèbres se dissipent, et que les animaux nocturnes regagnent leurs forts.

"Finissons nos chants, la Vierge Mère laisse reposer son fils, et la milice de l'Éternel fait la garde autour du berceau. Dormez, Agneau de Dieu, dormez. Vous aurez, hélas! dans la suite de tristes veilles à essuyer. Dormez, tandis qu'un doux sommeil tient vos sens assoupis, votre cœur veille au salut du Monde."

The Abbé's assertion that *Paradise Regained* was a more solid, and above all a more truly pious work than its predecessor therefore fell quite flat. Almost all French readers continued to regard it with a contempt unhampered by acquaintance, and Milton's other poems remained unknown to them even by name.

In the whole body of Miltonic discussion, there is hardly a more engaging document than the *Lettres Critiques sur le Paradis Perdu* which appeared, in 1731, with the initials B. R. The full name of the unknown was Bernard Routh; he was a Jesuit and an Irishman, and he had a mind of his own—a pleasant virtue, to which few French writers on the subject had so far much pretension. He excelled, like so many of his countrymen, in raising elegant logical structures of perfect symmetry, and quite unconnected with the ground. His view of *Paradise*

Lost was the usual one inverted; the style, the poetry he thought marvellous, but the plan was a shocking blunder.

"Je ne sais quel instinct, qui dans la lecture des ouvrages d'esprit prévient les réflexions, me révolta dès le premier coup d'œil contre le dessein de Milton. Le péché originel me parut une bien étrange matière pour un Poème épique, et en examinant les raisons de mon dégoût, j'en trouvai qui vous paraîtront assez plausibles. En effet, le sujet d'un poème épique doit être une action honnête. . . . Une action ne peut être sublime dès qu'elle est opposée aux bonnes mœurs; et par là rien ne mérite moins le nom de sublime que la désobéissance de notre premier père. Il est vrai que jamais événement n'a été plus célèbre, et n'a produit de plus étranges révolutions; mais, monsieur, vous savez, il s'en faut bien que la célébrité et les suites funestes rendent une action sublime: combien en voyons-nous tous les jours, dont le grand éclat et les fâcheuses conséquences ne servent qu'à augmenter le déshonneur?

"En effet, un autre caractère du Poème épique c'est que l'action en doit être heureuse, et jamais démarche ne réussit plus mal que celle que Milton a entrepris de célébrer."

These objections are levelled chiefly at the views of Addison. There is another point on which he disagrees with him even more warmly.

Addison, it will be remembered, observes that Homer chose for his epic a subject particularly in-

teresting to the Greeks, and Virgil a subject particularly interesting to the Romans. Milton in the same way, but even more ingeniously, chose a subject particularly interesting to the whole human race.

Routh declares himself positively stunned by the wrong-headedness of this assertion. "L'étrange chose que le préjugé! Les aventures de la Pucelle d'Orléans ont avec les affaires d'Angleterre les rapports les plus intimes. Les Anglais sont l'objet des Triomphes et des victoires de cette héroïne; et le poème de Chapelain, considéré sous ce point de vue, pourrait être justement intitulé La France Perdue. S'avisa-t-on jamais cependant de dire que le sujet de ce Poème est fort intéressant pour la Nation anglaise? . . . Le péché originel, par où flatte-t-il nos inclinations?"

He has faults of his own to find with the poem. He thought it took an unconscionable time getting under way. He set out to read about Adam and Eve and Paradise lost; when book after book went by and brought him no nearer them, he confesses that his patience gave out, and he began to skip. Adam strikes him as a poor sort of hero; a "gentillâtre de campagne" who spends his time weeding the garden and exchanging small talk and endearments with his wife. Alone among early critics, he got rather tired of Milton's harping on the superiority of the male. The conversation in Eden, he says, is no doubt charming; but its charm is "un peu gâté quelquefois par le soin que prend Adam de rappeler trop souvent

à Ève son autorité sur elle, la supériorité de ses talents, et le besoin qu'elle a de lui, les défauts qu'il lui trouve, etc. De pareilles leçons ont bien mauvaise grâce dans la bouche d'un honnête homme et d'un tendre époux." He seems to have felt for Eve on more than one occasion. "Que pensez-vous, Monsieur, de la manière dont Ève est traitée dans le Paradise Perdu? Raphael et Adam s'entretiennent pendant plusieurs heures en sa présence de mille choses intéressantes et plus curieuses les unes que les autres, et elle se tait. Elle n'a ni curiosité, ni vivacité, elle se réduit tranquillement à faire un personnage muet, et le Poète nous laisse ignorer d'où lui venait une patience si naturelle à la première des femmes."

He appreciated Satan. "Le Diable en enfer n'est pas si Diable qu'il est dans le Paradis Perdu." He liked him particularly in contrast to Adam's pedantic pusillanimity.

But it is on the question of style that this critic really shines. For one thing, he knew English; there is more in it than that, however.

"Milton's style is numerous and periodic. He was at pains to shun the tedious monotony of sounds and thoughts which is now grown so fashionable on the Parnassian slopes of Paris and of London. He knew not the art of fitting the number of his thoughts and sentences exactly to the number of his lines. His periods, indeed, are sometimes too long; but such faults are rare, and in requital, what a

variety of cadences! what a noble harmony throughout the whole Poem! Our modern tongues, in my judgment, have produced nothing equal to it; and it is this virtue, of all others, which brings Milton's poetry nearest that of Homer and Virgil."

Nothing so sensible will be said again before Chateaubriand.

Routh refuses to join in the common denigration of *Paradise Regained.* "J'ai lu le Paradis Recouvré, et je ne crains point de vous dire que je l'ai lu avec plaisir." It is true that nothing happens in it. "Satan parle, Jésus-Christ répond, c'est là tout le Poème." But it has sober virtues which the earlier poem lacks —"le vrai, le juste, le solide, le naturel et le bon sens". Nevertheless—"Je saurai toujours préférer les beautés irrégulières, mais vives, éblouissantes, touchantes du Paradis Perdu, aux grâces justes et naturelles, mais un peu fades, du Paradis Recouvré."

He rather spoils it all by adding that he prefers *Jerusalem Delivered.* The obvious, but singularly inept, comparison of that work with *Paradise Lost* was one of the commonplaces of Miltonic discussion.

By this time Voltaire had begun to think of backing out. He took the first step in 1732, when a new edition of the *Henriade* appeared with a revised French version of the *Essai sur la Poésie Épique.*

He described how Milton had got the first idea of his poem from an Italian comedy on the Fall. "Il y a dans ce sujet je ne sais quel horreur ténébreuse, un sublime sombre et triste, qui ne convient

pas mal à l'imagination anglaise. . . . Enfin, au lieu d'une Tragédie, qui après tout n'eût été que bizarre et non intéressante, il imagina un Poème épique, espèce d'ouvrage dans lequel les hommes sont convenus d'approuver souvent le bizarre sous le nom du merveilleux."

Another hit at Homer.

"The French, meanwhile, only laughed when they were told that England possessed an epic Poem, the subject of which was the devil fighting against God, and a serpent persuading a woman to eat an apple: such a subject they thought very fit for a burlesque. I was the first who made the French acquainted with some passages of Milton and of Shakespeare."

Then, he adds significantly, appeared St. Maur's translation of this "singular poem".

"On fut étonné de trouver dans un sujet qui paraît si stérile une si grande fertilité d'imagination. On admira les traits majestueux avec lesquels il ose peindre Dieu, et le caractère encore plus brillant qu'il donne au diable. On lut, avec beaucoup de plaisir, la description du jardin d'Éden, et des amours innocents d'Adam et d'Ève. . . . Mais tous les critiques judicieux, dont la France est pleine, se réunirent à trouver que le Diable parle trop souvent et trop longtemps de la même chose."

This was really one of Voltaire's own complaints. It may be doubted whether he ever saw anything in Satan.

"En admirant plusieurs idées sublimes ils jugèrent qu'il y en a plusieurs d'outrées, et que l'Auteur n'a rendues que puériles, en s'efforçant de les faire grandes. . . .

"Lorsque j'étais à Londres, j'osai composer en Anglais un petit Essai sur la poésie épique, dans lequel je pris la liberté de dire que nos bons juges français ne manqueraient pas de relever toutes les fautes dont je viens de parler. Ce que j'avais prévu est arrivé, et la plupart des critiques de ce pays-ci ont jugé, autant qu'on peut le faire sur une traduction, que le *Paradis perdu* est un ouvrage plus singulier que naturel, plus plein d'imagination que de grâces, et de hardiesse que de choix, dont le sujet est tout idéal, et qui semble n'être pas fait pour l'homme."

He is not actually tampering with the weights; only tipping the balance with a finger. The attitude so ingeniously ascribed to "les critiques judicieux, dont la France est pleine" might easily have been adopted under this handling; for no one has ever approached Voltaire's dexterity at forcing cards. But Milton had already become hopelessly fashionable. Worse: he had become accepted.

Voltaire may be reckoned the villain of the piece. In 1748 the heroine appeared. The friendship between the two was uninterrupted—such as it was. He called her—to her face, however—"la première personne de son sexe et de son siècle". This was Anne-Marie du Bocage.

She was a Rouennaise—a native of that serious, provincial Paris, "la ville où l'on pense". We see her there very young, pretty, charming, modestly intellectual, a little timid when raising her voice in the literary circles she admired. At seventeen she married a young man, an old friend, and a literary dabbler like herself. They were very happy together. Indeed, she was one of the happiest creatures that ever lived. No one ever exemplified more charmingly, in her own person, the beauties of moderation. The only shadow on her life appears to have been a slight struggle between the rival attractions of study and the world; and even this struggle she turned into a triumph. She astonished her contemporaries with the spectacle of a *femme savante* and a poetess—worst of all, an epic poetess—whose tastes, manners and conversation would have delighted *le bonhomme Chrysale*. They all exclaimed at the miracle. "Tout votre esprit," said one of them, "ne peut faire oublier vos charmes!" Another, a friend of her early days, gave even stronger testimony: "Je ne l'eusse jamais soupçonnée de faire des vers; je n'avais aperçu dans cette dame aucune prétension au bel esprit." She and her husband had moved to Paris to enlarge their literary sphere; but she made no attempt to push herself; she waited, and the lions came. One of the first and faithfullest was the aged Fontenelle, ninety years old when she first met him, but her close and attached friend for ten years. He loved her very much, and called her

his daughter. She, on the other hand, wondered that with so tender a heart he should be generally supposed to lack sensibility. "C'est que je n'en suis pas encore mort," was Fontenelle's explanation. After nearly ten years' acquaintance, he wrote one day under her picture:

> Autour de ce portrait couronné par la gloire
> Je vois voltiger les Amours:
> Et le temple de Gnide, et celui de Mémoire
> Se le disputeront toujours.

She found, indeed, that it snowed epigrams. Fontenelle has a prettier, on a similar occasion:

> Tu crois voir une Muse ici:
> Elle l'est bien, mais Grâce aussi.

We shall see presently what Voltaire had to say about her.

The portrait thus berhymed was encircled with laurels; for the smiling plump little bourgeoise had given herself away. She had written a prize poem.

This beginning was typical of her poetical activities; for an age decidedly, not for all time, but to be so exquisitely for an age is perhaps the best fate, especially for a woman. The prize had been offered by the Academy of Rouen, and she was the first to win it. The incident made a slight sensation. Justified, covered by this success, she took a bolder flight. In 1748 appeared *Le Paradis terrestre.*

Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden had always been what the French public liked best. It was their

old friend the pastoral poem, with its traditional shepherd and shepherdess, but freshened, animated, given a plausibility and interest they had never seen in it before. The scheme, therefore, of shortening and rearranging the poem so as to leave these favourite scenes in almost complete possession, was an extremely judicious one; and Mme. du Bocage carried it out in the most ladylike manner, and with the good sense and moderation on which all her charm was based. The Dedicatory Letter to the Academy of Rouen is a model of taste. She has been guided, she says, in her task by "le désir de plaire à ma Nation en me conformant à son goût. . . . Si j'ai réussi à rassembler sous un point de vue agréable l'intérêt et les grâces que l'Auteur a répandus sur la félicité et sur les malheurs d'Adam et d'Ève dans le *Paradis terrestre*, j'aurai rempli mon projet. Je ne prétends point donner une idée complète de la vaste étendue du génie de Milton. . . . J'ai voulu réduire en petit un grand et sublime tableau." Her poem is a miniature; and in a miniature many beauties will necessarily be lost. French readers who would like a more exact idea of the original are referred to the elegant translation by Dupré de St. Maur.

This was her modest project; and the poem is as feminine as the design. It *is* a miniature; that describes it exactly. Seeing how quickly she gets over the ground Milton took so long to cover, one rather wonders what he made all the fuss about. This is the opening paragraph:

Sagesse, don du Ciel, soutiens mon harmonie:
Je chante du Très-Haut la puissance infinie.
Dis comment sa parole enfanta l'univers:
Prête-moi tes couleurs pour peindre dans mes vers
Le sort du premier homme en des lieux de délices:
De son fier ennemi dis-moi les artifices.
Quels funestes récits! O Mortels, écoutez,
Apprenez le destin des Anges révoltés;
L'Éternel les plongea dans l'infernal abîme:
Le Remords dans ce gouffre est toujours près du crime;
La Paix n'abite point ce séjour odieux,
L'Espoir en est banni, lui qu'on trouve en tous lieux.
Dans les feux y gémit la douleur renaissante:
Ici la vie expire, et la mort est vivante.

So briskly does she dismiss Milton's opening scene. Of course her goal was the Earthly Paradise; she reaches it in the second canto, and remains there. It is the pastoral undisguised, the Golden Age with every modern refinement.

Dans les champs où l'Euphrate, éloigné de sa source,
Abandonne le Tigre et le joint dans sa course,
Se présentent d'Éden les jardins enchantés;
Là, d'un premier printemps tout offre les beautés.
Des Cèdres, des Palmiers élevés jusqu'aux nues
De ce séjour charmant forment les avenues.
Sur l'or et les Saphirs serpentent les ruisseaux,
Et dans les prés naissants bondissent les troupeaux;
Aux approches du Loup l'Agneau paraît sans crainte,
Le Tigre est sans fureur et le Renard sans feinte.

And where has Milton got to?

Mme. du Bocage could not help tidying up Paradise a little, preferring "nice art" to "nature boon"; she had no more of a taste for the country

than an elegant landscape garden could have satisfied. Milton's

> . . . evening gray
> Had in her sober livery all things clad

she delightfully rendered:

> Peignant sur les objets ses *lugubres* couleurs
> Le frais du crépuscle apaisait les chaleurs.

The shepherd and shepherdess just suit the garden. They are an amiable couple.

> Adam unit la force à la beauté des traits:
> Ève joint la douceur auz plus brillants attraits.
>
> Ce couple fortuné, créé dans l'innocence,
> Sans voile aux yeux de Dieu, n'en craint point la présence.
> A l'ombre d'un berceau rafraîchi par les eaux
> Ils vont se délasser de leurs légers travaux;
> Leurs jardins n'exigeaient que les soins nécessaires
> Pour goûter le repos et des mets salutaires;
> Sur des bancs de gazon ornés de mille fleurs
> Les arbres leur portaient des fruits et des odeurs.
> Leur suc les rassasie, et dans l'écorce dure
> Ils puisent pour la soif une eau légère et pure;
> Le sourire enchanteur, les entretiens charmants,
> Tout ce qu'Amour inspire à de jeunes amants
> Seuls habitants du monde, et vivant sans alarmes,
> Achèvent d'embellir ce repas plein de charmes.

It is a more attractive scene than Milton's. There is no concealing amiability, or the lack of it; and Mme. du Bocage would certainly have been a better companion in the Earthly Paradise than her original. The lovers talk like themselves, but with an added

little touch of refinement and gallantry, especially on Adam's side. Eve says, for instance:

Avec toi tout me charme en ces belles demeures;
J'oublie, en te parlant, les saisons et les heures:
Mais le frais du matin, le lever du Soleil,
Les concerts des Oiseaux annonçant leur réveil,
Les fruits encore brillants des larmes de l'Aurore,
Le parfum de ces fleurs que nous voyons éclore,
L'air pur de ce beau soir, le silence, la nuit,
La Lune dont l'éclat nous charme et nous séduit,
Les yeux du firmament, et leur céleste flamme,
Sans toi n'ont rien de doux, rien qui plaît à mon âme;
Mais pourquoi dans les Cieux tant de flambeaux épars,
Tandis que le sommeil en prive nos regards?

Tes discours enchanteurs et remplis de sagesse
De mon cœur, dit Adam, augmentent la tendresse.

She does not exactly skip any of Adam's lectures; she was too discreet; but from her lips they lose all their rigidity. And in the reconciliation he is very amiable:

Désarmé par ses pleurs, son époux la relève.
Tu me perces le cœur: viens dans mes bras, chère Ève.

And the poem does not lack weight. The conversation with Raphael is treated at length; she was enough of a Philaminte to take some pleasure in it. The whole thing extends to six cantos; all enchanting if one likes that kind of thing, and has been softened in advance by the attractions of the writer. Perhaps to ensure the second condition, her portrait was prefixed to it.

The *Mémoires de Trévoux*, Milton's old enemy,

reviewed this work with condescending appreciation, but had one little blemish to point out. "On n'a pas approuvé que les images, tant celles des vignettes que celles des vers, fussent si souvent sans draperie; et l'on a fait cette réflexion tout à fait grave et sérieuse: qu'en décrivant l'état d'innocence on n'a pas dû exposer les lecteurs à devenir coupables."

The objection to the verses Mme. du Bocage had done her best to forestall: "The English poet justly thought himself entitled to depict in the liveliest manner the pure loves of Adam and Eve. I have attempted to imitate the expressive simplicity of his colours, when representing nature in that happy age, to which the words 'art' and 'impropriety' were unknown." But of course the grievance was, as of old, the *changement d'amour*—the first scene after the Fall. And here Mme. du Bocage was in the wrong. In Milton's version the indecency (if, as Voltaire said of the Meanness of the subject, there is any) lies in the insinuating circumlocution of Adam's advances; the "Eve, now I see thou art exact of taste"; the new, and evidently relished, sense of guilt. It was a moral idea, for it makes the scene slightly disagreeable. Perhaps Mme. du Bocage in her real innocence did not even see this point, or perhaps she left it out because she disliked it; at any rate she did leave it out.

> Dans les tendres douceurs de leur chaîne fidèle
> La volupté fait naître une chaleur nouvelle:
> . . . . . .

Adam exprime ainsi son délire amoureux:
Chère épouse, ces fruits ont produit en mon âme
Une joie inconnue, une plus vive flamme.
Que de transports ardents manquaient à nos amours!
Quels moments! Jouissons du plus beau de nos jours.

It is all pleasant and straightforward, and arouses, as the earlier critic unjustly observed, no horror at the effect of the first sin. So she was in the wrong there. But the objection to the vignettes is too frivolous. How they could possibly be draped, if there were to be any, is not suggested. The illustrator went as far as he could; he even cheated a little. In almost all the early scenes, something —a leaf, a lock of hair, a knee—discreetly interposes when suitable; draperies, whenever possible, float round them all, sustained only by a sense of decency. And they are not at all captivating. The only engraving which could reasonably be called seductive is the writer's head in the frontispiece; the most charming, arch, sober, smiling-Hebè countenance in the world, all wreathed in laurels. Voltaire probably spoke much more the general opinion of her book:

En vain Milton, dont vous suivez les traces,
Peint l'âge d'or comme un songe effacé;
Dans vos écrits, embellis par les Grâces,
On croit revoir un temps trop tôt passé.
Vivre avec vous dans le temple des Muses,
Lire vos vers, et les voir applaudis,
Malgré l'enfer, le serpent et les ruses,
Charmante Églé, voilà le Paradis.

For *Le Paradis terrestre* had, as it deserved, its little day of brilliance. One critic declared that the writer had done "ce qu'il eût été à désirer que Milton eût fait", and probably many more thought so. Voltaire, on his side, knew when Milton's teeth were drawn; Mme. du Bocage was worth knowing and not dangerous, and he cultivated her accordingly. He wrote to her in 1749: "Vous vous êtes couronnée de roses, de myrtes, de lauriers; vous joignez l'empire de la beauté à celui de l'esprit et des talents." And again:

> Milton, dont vous suivez les traces,
> Vous prête ses transports divins:
> Ève est la mère des humains,
> Et vous êtes celle des Grâces.
> Comment n'eût-elle pas séduit
> La raison la plus indomptable?
> Vous lui donnez tout votre esprit:
> Adam était bien pardonnable.

She wrote to condole with him on the death of Mme. du Châtelet, and he replied:

"Hélas! Madame, il n'y avait pas quatre jours que j'avais relu votre tragédie avec elle. Nous avions lu ensemble votre Milton avec l'anglais. Vous la regretteriez bien davantage si vous aviez été témoin de cette lecture. . . .

"Adieu, Madame; si je peux avoir quelque consolation sur la terre, ce sera de vous faire ma cour à Paris, et de vous dire à quel point je vous respecte et vous admire. Ce ne sont pas là les sentiments où

l'on se borne quand on a l'honneur de vous connaître."

That was the tone he thought suitable with women. He inserted a little insinuation of the kind so punctiliously, that it is a wonder a sensible woman could bear it; but there is no doubt she was flattered. He overflowed with epigrams. On the eve of her journey to Italy he wrote:

> Nouvelle Muse, aimable Grâce,
> Allez au Capitole; allez, rapportez-nous
> Les myrtes de Pétrarque et les lauriers du Tasse.
> Si tous deux revivaient, ils chanteraient pour vous;
> Et, voyant vos beaux yeux et votre poésie,
> Tous deux mourraient à vos genoux
> Ou d'amour ou de jalousie.

Then a little paragraph in Italian to show his versatility, and to conclude:

"Good journey, Milton's daughter, Camoens's sister."

His English was a little rusty.

The grand event of their acquaintance was her visit to Ferney; that is, it was grand to her. She really had a very tender feeling for him afterwards, so he must have behaved pleasantly; and she used to talk of the visit to the end of her life with great pride, for she was a simple soul. He wrote to her shortly after:

"Vous devez être lasse de compliments. Permettez-moi seulement de vous dire que, malgré tous vos talents et tout votre mérite, je vous ai trouvée la femme du monde la plus simple, la plus

aisée à vivre, la plus digne d'avoir des amis, quoique vous soyez très faite pour avoir mieux. . . . Conservez quelque bonté, je vous en conjure, pour le vieux Suisse Voltaire, à qui vous faites encore aimer la France, et qui est plein pour vous de respect, d'estime et de tous les sentiments que vous méritez."

And a little later, talking of an engraving in which he had been represented as a bear: "Pour vous, Madame, quand on vous grave, c'est sur Minerve qu'on prend modèle.

> Dans ce charmant assemblage,
> L'ignorant, le connaisseur,
> L'ami, l'amant, l'amateur
> Reconnaissent du Bocage.

Mes nieces et moi nous baisons humblement les feuilles de vos lauriers." Hypocritical, but pleasant. Unfortunately, when she wrote an epic of her own, *La Colombiade*, he let himself go a moment, and, if Grimm is to be relied on, was rude about her; so grossly rude, that the story does not bear repeating. But she never found out. The friendship was unbroken.

It is a curious and hardly creditable fact that *Le Paradis terrestre* was almost as popular in England as in France. Lord Barnewell burst forth on the occasion:

> Amongst the honours wond'ring Europe pays
> To Milton, father of immortal lays,
> If ought can touch his happy soul below
> It is the glory he received from you.

Now Britain with you should divide his crown:
For had you not, to make his beauties known,
In your soft language turned his noble theme
Her greatest bard had got but half his fame.

This may be called poetic justice to Milton, or dramatic irony. It is likely, indeed, that he would not have read *Le Paradis terrestre*, and observed its success without emotion.

She visited England, wrote about it and liked it; English manners pleased her rather old-fashioned sedateness. What an agreeable change, she says, to be in a great concourse of people and yet not stunned by noise! "M. de Fontenelle assure que de son temps on ne parlait point tous ensemble." She liked the English women, "sans rouge et toujours lacées", who were like "les portraits de nos grand'mères", and resembled them also in "l'accueil affable et les bonnes mœurs". She was well received, and much admired. Her chief friends were the Chesterfields, and probably on that account Horace Walpole writes of her with acrimony:

"There is come from France a Mme. Bocage who has translated Milton: my Lord Chesterfield prefers the copy to the original, but that is not uncommon for him to do who is the patron of bad authors and bad actors. She has written a play too, which was damned, and worthy my Lord's approbation."

But she heard only the praise. It is a pity she should have been forgotten. *Le Paradis terrestre* is a very pretty book, though its author was prettier.

Still it was hardly a serious contribution to the study of Milton. His next translator made up for that. Whatever quality Louis Racine might be supposed to lack, it was not weight; and he paid Milton the singular compliment of learning English solely in order to read him in the original.

He had been very much intrigued by St. Maur's translation. In his *Réflexions sur la Poésie*, and on the strength of this second-hand acquaintance, he had already dealt with the English poet at some length. It is true he had abused him. There was a general disinclination among the old school in France to believe that any good thing could come out of London, and Louis had no passion for the unusual. In his *Essay on Dramatic Poetry* he has dismissed Shakespeare with a warning. "Shakespeare, fondateur du théâtre anglais, fit tout à la fois parler prose et vers, rire, pleurer et hurler Melpomène." France first taught Europe what the drama should be; "mais les Anglais, constants à admirer les étincelles qui sortent quelquefois des brouillards de leur Shakespeare, ne nous envièrent point nos richesses dramatiques. . . . On doit placer l'époque d'un meilleur goût en Angleterre au Caton d'Addison." When he came to Milton, therefore, he was prepared to find him barbarous, and he did. He treated him with great condescension. He deplored the national vanity which put him on the level of Homer and Virgil. But he translated long passages of him into French verse.

For example:

Tout meurt, et tout renaît. L'automne, tous les ans,
Fait place au triste hiver que suit le doux printemps;
Les zéphirs en tous lieux ramènent la verdure;
Aux arbres dépouillés ils rendent leur parure;
Et par l'ordre constant d'une agréable loi
Tout revient, mais le jour ne revient pas pour moi.
Fleurs, qui nous étalez vos peintures nouvelles;
Roses, que du matin la fraîcheur rend si belles;
Vous, filles de l'aurore, éclatantes couleurs,
Vous ne pourrez donc plus m'adoucir mes malheurs!
O troupeaux, que l'œil suit bondissant dans la plaine,
Vos jeux ne pourront plus m'égayer dans ma peine!
Où vais-je dans ma perte étendre mes regrets,
Lorsque de l'homme, hélas, je ne vois plus les traits!
Je ne vois plus ce front, siège auguste où Dieu même
Fait briller un rayon de sa beauté suprême.
Dans un affreux néant tout me semble abîmé,
Et pour moi la nature est un livre fermé.

He deplored this digression, however; Homer would have shown better taste.

His poetical renderings of Milton drew down Voltaire upon his head—anonymously. This protean adversary, or a disciple working under his eye, shortly afterwards composed a little treatise on *The Beauties and Blemishes of Poetry and Eloquence in the French Language*, for the use of foreigners. Its object was to form and correct their taste in French literature by means of illustrative examples. In a series of extracts from the best French poets, such as La Fontaine, Corneille, Racine and M. de Voltaire, the almost invariable superiority of the

last mentioned is helpfully pointed out. And even Racine *le fils* is laid under contribution.

"I have seen", says the benevolent author of this little work, "translations of several passages of that singular poem, *Paradise Lost*. M. de Voltaire and M. Racine *le fils* have each put into verse an apostrophe of Satan to the sun. I shall not stay to consider the wild and extraordinary character of the original; I am here concerned only with the beauties required by a translation into verse.

"M. Racine thus expresses himself:

Toi, dont le front brillant fait pâlir les étoiles,
Toi qui contrains la nuit à retirer ses voiles,
Triste image, à mes yeux, de celui qui t'a fait,
Que ta clarté m'afflige et que mon cœur te haît!
Ta splendeur, ô soleil! rappelle à ma mémoire
Quel éclat fut le mien dans le temps de ma gloire;
Élevé dans le ciel, près de mon souverain,
Je m'y voyais comblé des bienfaits que sa main,
Sans jamais se lasser, versait en abondance.

"M. de Voltaire's version is as follows:

Toi, sur qui mon tyran prodigue ses bienfaits,
Soleil, astre de feu, jour heureux que je hais,
Jour qui fais mon supplice, et dont mes yeux s'étonnent,
Toi qui sembles le dieu des cieux qui t'environnent,
Devant qui tout éclat disparaît et s'enfuit,
Qui fais pâlir le front des astres de la nuit;
Image du Très-Haut qui régla ta carrière,
Hélas! j'eusse autrefois éclipsé ta lumière.
Sur la voûte des cieux plus élevé que toi,
Le trône où tu t'assieds s'abaissait devant moi.
Je suis tombé, l'orgueil m'a plongé dans l'abîme.

"It is easy to see why the lines last cited are superior to the first; they have warmth, vigour, enthusiasm; in short, they are the lines of a poet."

The feelings of the English reader may perhaps confound both versions in "un morne étonnement." It is fair to say that Louis rather improved on his in a poem of his own:

> Tu parais, ô soleil! ta gloire incomparable
> Efface le flambeau qui préside à la nuit.
> D'étoiles devant toi quelle armée innombrable
> Se dissipe et s'enfuit!

Also, for once, he had the last word. When he produced his prose translation he added a note to Satan's speech, in which he says in effect: "M. de Voltaire and I have both imitated this admirable monologue; but I cannot praise either version."

Well, say what he might about the faults of Milton's poem, he had sucked in the poison. He was extremely taken with it. Perhaps, after all, his censure and that of his contemporaries was largely self-defensive; few critics can give themselves away about a new poet without a struggle. Why a critic so conservative should have liked so startling a poem, is a question which really admits only the simplest answer: he liked it because he saw that it was good: or rather, he felt its power. It is a mistake to suppose that Louis's piety had anything to do with the original attraction; like all truly pious people of his age, he held religion to be a boring topic, and religious themes essentially unengaging.

Most of the religious poetry he was acquainted with confirmed this view. As he says himself, with great frankness:

> Nos poètes chrétiens presque tous ennuyeux
> Ont à peine formé des sons harmonieux.

Not that he thought good religious poetry impossible; that would have been a depressing belief to a man who spent most of his spare time writing it. But the more religious the less likely to be good. It was, therefore, an agreeable surprise to him to find Milton's really excellent; it did increase his interest, once the charm had been felt. But he had heard that St. Maur's translation, though elegant, was anything but exact. This was annoying. His curiosity was actually irritated to the point of inducing him to learn English himself.

The effect was magical. He said, indeed, afterwards, that his opinion of Milton had not materially changed—it seems to have been almost a point of honour with French critics not to change their minds about Milton—but he instantly declared him to be "à la versification près" the greatest epic poet since Homer. And he set about translating the whole of *Paradise Lost* into French prose; a translation whose merit was to be the accuracy St. Maur's lacked.

It has this merit—up to a point. It is no more like Milton than St. Maur's was; but it sticks to him much closer. Of course, no eighteenth-century translator

of this poet could resist improving on the original; respect comes in with Chateaubriand. But Louis did think he was being as literal as he could. Some change, simply to make his language really French, had to be allowed for: that is what he would have said. Unfortunately, Milton somehow evaporated in the process. The notes are copious and sometimes curious. Louis set out with the avowed intention of leaving Milton's theology to its fate; but occasionally it was too much for him. "Les traits"—in Voltaire's phrase—"avec lesquels il ose peindre Dieu" were his severest trial. On God's remarks about the Fall, he observes: "il semble que le Père Éternel craigne que les Anges ne lui disent, C'est votre faute." Almost everything that goes on in Heaven excites his reprobation. Milton's morals, on the other hand, he thought admirable, but he could not understand how a man's principles and his practice should be so discordant. In a note to "Hail, wedded love", he says: "Dans un poème où le mariage est si saintement établi, le poète a eu raison de lui rendre hommage; et puisqu'il se maria trois fois, il paraît que c'est très sincèrement qu'il fait ce salut au mariage; mais le faisait-il lorsqu'il composait son Traité sur le Divorce? Il n'y a pas apparence qu'il ait composé ce morceau du vivant de sa première femme." In a way he is very like Voltaire; the same petrifying superficiality, working in the opposite direction. And like Voltaire, he has his epic poet to discredit. Dante is his *bête noire*. Voltaire's method

of dealing with this monstrous writer had been ingenious and highly characteristic; in the *Essai sur la Poésie épique* he ignored him, and gave a chapter to Trissino. Louis is more straightforward. "I am exasperated", he frankly says, "by the praise which has been given to this poet"; and he proceeds to vent his irritation. Milton naturally shines by contrast.

All his verse translations reappear in the notes, "because", he said, "he had published them already". This seems a poet's reason.

The book was guardedly received. It is doubtful if there had been a demand for another prose version of Milton; most people were quite satisfied with St. Maur's. The general opinion was that Louis, in his attempt to avoid inaccuracy, had fallen into the worse fault of heaviness. Nobody, in fact, cared about accuracy very much. Still, Louis's translation had a certain prestige: Chateaubriand in the next century mentions it as the best so far.

The Miltonic ball continued rolling; and Voltaire continued to let off at intervals his distant and random guns. In a little poem on the *Henriade*, just before his original recantation, he had written:

> Milton, plus sublime qu'eux tous,
> A des beautés moins agréables;
> Il semble chanter pour les fous,
> Pour les anges et pour les diables.

Later he stressed this note. In an anonymous article in the *Philosophical Dictionary* he says:

"Milton was never heard of in France until the

author of the *Henriade*, in his *Essay on Epic Poetry*, gave us an idea of him. This writer was indeed, if I mistake not, the first to bring us acquainted with the English Poets, as he was first to explain the discoveries of Newton and the sentiments of Locke. But when he was asked what he thought of the genius of Milton, he replied, 'that whereas the Greeks recommended their poets to sacrifice to the Graces, Milton had sacrificed to the Devil'.... Others then resolved on translating the English epic, of some parts of which M. de Voltaire had spoken very well."

This was in 1771; no doubt the facts had got a little blurred. Voltaire with indefatigable self-advertisement then reproduced his own translation of Satan's soliloquy, with eleven lines more:

Hélas! je fus ingrat, c'est là mon plus grand crime.
J'osai me révolter contre mon créateur:
C'est peu de me créer, il fut mon bienfaiteur;
Il m'aimait: j'ai forcé sa justice éternelle
D'appesantir son bras sur ma tête rebelle;
Je l'ai rendu barbare en sa sévérité;
Il punit à jamais, et je l'ai mérité.
Mais si le repentir pouvait obtenir grâce! . . .
Non, rien ne fléchira ma haine et mon audace;
Non, je déteste un maître, et sans doute il vaut mieux
Régner dans les enfers qu'obéir dans les cieux.

If he really thought Satan's speeches were in this strain, no wonder he also thought they were too long. In the same article he found room for his favourite little story about Pope:

"I shall never forget asking the celebrated Pope why Milton had not written his *Paradise Lost* in rhyme. He replied, 'Because he could not.' "

This reminds one of the story in Boswell, how Lord Hopeton found one of his shepherds reading *Paradise Lost*. He asked him what book it was, and the shepherd replied, "An't please your Lordship, this is a very odd sort of an author: he would fain rhyme, but cannot get at it." Boswell calls it "one of the most natural instances of the effect of blank verse". The English reader should remember this; remember Dr. Johnson's opinion that blank verse "seems to be verse only to the eye": and not give way to a feeling of superiority when Voltaire treats it as an invention of laziness, or Louis Racine declares that it sounds, both in English and Italian, exactly like prose.

The year before, an Englishman, George Gray, had sent Voltaire a parody of Milton's poem; he wrote back: "J'ai toujours pensé que l'aventure de la pomme ne méritait qu'une plaisanterie in *dogrel rhimes:* j'aime mieux la servante Vixen qu'un ennuyeux ange Gabriel et qu'un vilain diable qui disent toujours la même chose."

But he really polished off both Homer and Milton in *Candide*.

Candide and Martin had called on Signor Pococurante, and among other things he showed them his library.

"Candide en voyant un Homère magnifiquement

relié, loua l'illustrissime sur son bon goût. Voilà, dit-il, un livre qui faisait les délices du grand Pangloss, le meilleur philosophe de l'Allemagne. Il ne fait pas les miennes, dit froidement Pococurante: on me fit accroire autrefois que j'avais du plaisir en le lisant. . . . J'ai demandé quelquefois à des savants s'ils s'ennuyaient autant que moi à cette lecture. Tous les gens sincères m'ont avoué que le livre leur tombait des mains."

Of course, it is Pococurante speaking. This kind of spurious anonymity was just what Voltaire liked.

"Candide, apercevant un Milton, lui demanda s'il ne regarda pas cet auteur comme un grand homme. Qui? dit Pococurante, ce barbare qui fait un commentaire en dix livres de vers durs du premier livre de Genèse, ce grossier imitateur des Grecs, qui défigure la création et qui, tandis que Moïse représente l'Être Éternel produisant le monde par la parole, fait prendre un grand compas par le Messiah dans une armoire du ciel pour tracer son ouvrage? Moi j'estimerais celui qui a gâté l'Enfer et le Diable du Tasse; qui déguise Lucifer tantôt en crapaud, tantôt en pigmée; qui lui fait rebattre cent fois les mêmes discours; qui le fait disputer sur la théologie; qui en imitant sérieusement l'invention comique des armes à feu de l'Arioste, fait tirer le canon dans le Ciel par les Diables? Ni moi, ni personne en Italie n'a pu se plaire à toutes ces tristes extravagances; et le mariage du péché et de la mort, et les couleuvres dont le péché accouche, font vomir

tout homme qui a le goût un peu délicat. Ce poème obscur, bizarre et dégoûtant, fut méprisé à sa naissance; je le traite aujourd'hui comme il fut traité dans sa patrie par les contemporains."

These were his reasons—he had no better.

He has something to say on Milton's other poems. In 1763 he reviewed a prose poem entitled *Le Christiade, ou le Paradis reconquis*, by the Abbé de la Baume:

"What can have led a learned and sometimes eloquent writer to produce this Poem—if it be a Poem? The example of Milton; he admits it in his Preface, but we know how treacherous is example. Milton himself, who, by the bye, did not venture to bring forth so feeble a monster as a poem in prose—Milton who introduced some fine lines among the harsh and obscure verse which forms the chief of his poem—even Milton could hope to please none but fanatical Whigs, as the Abbé Grécourt has it,

> En chantant l'univers perdu pour une pomme,
> Et Dieu pour le damner créant le premier homme.

Presbyterians may have been delighted with the amours of Sin and Death, with the firing of cannon in Heaven, with the wars betwixt hot and cold and wet and dry, with angels cut in two and closing up again, with the building a bridge over Chaos, with the Messiah taking from a cupboard in Heaven an enormous compass to trace out the earth, etc. Virgil and Horace might have thought these ideas strange.

"But Milton, too, has his romance of the New Testament, and in blank verse not very different from the vilest prose. Come, come, leave Milton to pit Satan against Christ as often as he chooses. Leave it to him to depict in pompous lines a herd of two thousand swine driven through Galilee by a legion of devils, that is by six thousand seven hundred devils, who take possession of them (three devils and seven-twentieths to every pig) and drown them in a lake. It is for Milton to make the Devil invite God to eat a little supper with him; to show him loading the table with ortolans, partridges, sole, sturgeon, and summoning Hebe and Ganymede to fill the glass of Jesus Christ. He next carries God off to the top of a hill, and shows him the Capitol, the Moluccas, and the Indian city which was the birthplace of Angelica—the fair Angelica, who cost Roland his wits. And at last he offers to give God all this, provided he will consent to worship him. But yet Milton was laughed at; you are being laughed at: better take it quietly."

In the *Dictionary*, article "Samson", he says:

"Jean ou John Milton, longtemps maître d'école à Londres, puis secrétaire pour le latin du parlement nommé le croupion; Milton, auteur du *Paradis perdu* et du *Paradis retrouvé*, fit la tragédie de Samson Agoniste; et il est bien cruel de ne pouvoir dire en quelle année. Ceux qui aiment les longues déclamations seront satisfaits de cette pièce."

They went on reading Milton just the same.

Translations multiplied; all different and all wrong. The century drew to a close. Then, in 1801, above the thin accents of the orthodox, rose the gorgeous voice of Chateaubriand.

The appreciation of Milton in his *Essai sur la Littérature anglaise* makes everything that had been said on the subject before appear as unsubstantial as a dream. So far French critics had been talking of a phantom, a framework, a logical construction of their own, that might be remotely deducible from Milton, but that in Milton the poet simply does not exist. In the very sound of Chateaubriand's opening sentence reality breaks through:

"Au-dessus d'une foule de prosateurs et de poètes, pendant les règnes orageux de Charles I^er^ et du Protecteur, s'élève la belle tête de Milton."

Chateaubriand certainly had no special feeling for Milton's religious and political views; not a tenth of the sympathy Voltaire ought to have had; not so very much more than Louis Racine himself; and certainly he knew no more about them. Very often he says the same things as Louis; the things are the same, but they are hardly recognisable. For instance:

"Puritain d'abord, ensuite indépendant, anabaptiste, il devient *saint*, quiétiste et enthousiaste: ce n'est plus qu'une Voix qui chante l'Éternel."

Louis had said:

"Puritain dans sa jeunesse, il se rangea, pour être

plus libre, parmi les Indépendants et les Anabaptistes; et enfin, pour être plus libre encore, il ne voulut plus être d'aucun secte, soutenant que la religion devait être intérieure. Il devint Quiétiste et enthousiaste: *fin déplorable d'un génie rare.*"

The facts have suffered, in transit, a remarkable sea-change.

Chateaubriand's essay included a few passages of *Paradise Lost*, translated by himself. After what had passed for translations in the eighteenth century, their fidelity is actually startling; they seem almost more like Milton than Milton himself. Here is his final version of Satan's much-rendered monologue:

"O toi qui, couronné d'une gloire incomparable, regardes du haut de ton empire solitaire comme le Dieu de ce monde nouveau; toi à la vue duquel toutes les étoiles cachent leurs têtes amoindries: je crie vers toi, mais non avec une voix amie; je ne prononce ton nom, ô soleil, que pour te dire combien je hais tes rayons. Ils me rappellent l'état dont je suis tombé, et combien autrefois je m'élevais glorieux au-dessus de ta sphère."

In the *Génie du Christianisme* he said of this speech: "Quelle que soit notre admiration pour Homère, nous sommes obligés de convenir qu'il n'a rien de comparable à ce passage de Milton."

To realise how far Chateaubriand was in advance of his age—indeed, how completely he was out of sight of it—one has only to look at Delille's verse translation of *Paradise Lost*, which appeared in

1805. The Preface is quite in the old strain; it is hard to understand how it could have been written after the *Essai sur la Littérature anglaise*. There is a good deal about the Meanness of the subject; the changing of the fallen angels into serpents, for instance, is particularly deplored. "Le dernier conseil des anges rebelles ne paraît être qu'une parodie du premier." This is meant as censure, though what higher praise could he have given it? Mention is made of some points on which the author has departed from his original; le Péché, for instance, has become la Révolte. "Cette heureuse infidélité n'est pas le seul service que M. Delille a rendu à Milton." It would all have seemed quite natural a few years before, but now how faded!

The translation itself is a very elegant affair. This is part of Milton's lament for his blindness:

> Les ans, les mois, les jours, par une sage loi,
> Tout revient, mais le jour ne revient pas pour moi:
> Mes yeux cherchent en vain les fleurs fraîches écloses,
> Mes printemps sont sans grâce, et mes étés sans roses.
> J'ai perdu des ruisseaux le cristal argentin,
> Le pourpre du couchant, les rayons du matin,
> Et les jeux des troupeaux, et ce noble visage
> Où le dieu qui fit l'homme a gravé son image.

Delille modestly congratulated himself on having improved sometimes on what was set before him. "Je me suis permis d'ajouter quelques idées à celles de Milton: on doit quelquefois faire plus que son modèle, précisément parce que souvent on ne peut

pas faire aussi bien." One more quotation will show how he *could* improve.

> Mais avec même ardeur je poursuivrai mes chants,
> Non moins harmonieux, peut-être plus touchants.
> Dans ces temps malheureux, dans ce siècle de haine,
> J'irai, je charmerai la discorde inhumaine,
> Ma triste cécité, les cries de mes rivaux,
> Et le toit paternel où se cachent mes maux.
> Que dis-je? suis-je seul? ah! divine Uranie!
> Non, ta douce présence inspire mon génie,
> Soit quand la nuit revient, soit lorsque le soleil
> Prête ses feux naissants à l'orient vermeil.
> Viens donc, ah! viens encor protéger ton poète:
> Favorise mes chants; dans mon humble retraite
> Conduis quelques amis qui chérissent mes vers,
> Et quand j'ai tout perdu, sois pour moi l'univers.

What could be nicer?

While Delille was improving on Milton, Chateaubriand was still learning from him. At last, in 1836, his own translation appeared.

There existed already, he said, in prose and verse a dozen translations and at least forty imitations of the English poet; but this might be called the work of a lifetime—"car il y a trente ans que je lis, relis et traduis Milton." And the more he translated him, the more perfectly, the more passionately faithful he became. Every change from his earlier versions is in the direction of the original. One more glimpse of the result will give a fair idea of the whole.

"Cependant je ne cesse d'errer aux lieux fréquentés des Muses, claires fontaines, bocages om-

breux, collines dorées du soleil, épris que je suis de l'amour des chants sacrés. Mais toi surtout, ô Sion, toi et les ruisseaux fleuris qui baignent tes pieds saints et coulent en murmurant, je vous visite pendant la nuit. . . . Alors je me nourris des pensées qui produisent d'elles-mêmes les nombres harmonieux, comme l'oiseau qui veille chante dans l'obscurité: caché sous le plus épais couvert, il soupire ses nocturnes complaintes."

Milton, at length, has crossed the Channel.

LIFE OF MILTON

LIFE OF MILTON

When the English were apprised that Milton, long dead and forgotten, was the Homer of his nation, they began to desire particulars which would scarcely have aroused the curiosity of a succeeding age, had he composed only those works which had made him known during his lifetime. All were anxious to learn what had been the manners of the author of *Paradise Lost*, what had been his life, what had been his character, at what age he had lost his sight, at what time of the year he wrote his poems, what had been his stature and his physiognomy. The first note to the article dedicated to him in Bayle's *Dictionary* is entitled: "Facts concerning the countenance and height of Milton". This sudden admiration of a poet, unknown as a poet while he lived, soon multiplied the portraits, busts and lives of Milton.

To make my readers acquainted with him (and it is well to know him before reading his poem), I shall confine myself to the most curious facts I have discovered relating to this extraordinary man, in his *Life* written by Richardson, and in that which Thomas Newton has placed at the head of his hand-

some edition of *Paradise Lost*, published in London in 1749.

Milton came of a gentleman's family. He has written that he was born *genere honesto*. This family, in the general opinion, was native to the county of Oxford. His grandfather was a Catholic, and disinherited his son, John Milton, because he had embraced the Protestant Faith. This John Milton established himself in London, where he became a notary. The necessity he was under of labouring for profit did not however prevent him from consecrating some time to agreeable recreations, to the fine arts, and especially to music; and so soon as he had the power of renouncing his profession, he retired into the country. He had two sons; John, whose life I am writing, and Christopher, whose wit was no more than common, and who remained in obscurity, even after the restoration of the royal family, though he had always been attached to it.

John Milton, his elder brother, was of the other party, and of a character very different. Born in 1608, he early gave proofs of his genius, and the first inheritance he received from his father, who neglected nothing for his education, was a taste for music and the arts. His eagerness to learn was such that at the age of twelve he spent a great part of the night in reading; he was subject in consequence to severe headaches, and his sight early began to give way. He learned the rudiments in his father's house, continued his studies at St. Paul's School, and was

then sent to Christ's College in Cambridge, where he announced his love of poetry by several compositions, as well in Latin as in his own tongue. He paraphrased one or two of the Psalms in English verse; he looked upon himself as born to be a poet, for he says in his Latin verses that between his father and himself Apollo had shared his gifts, allotting a talent for music to the father, and for poetry to the son. He received at Cambridge in 1628 the degree of bachelor, and that of master in 1632.

His enemies gave out that he had been dismissed the university for vicious conduct; a slander which has been refuted. He quitted it because he would not accept a place there. He refused likewise to enter into religious orders, being an enemy to every tie; and his love of liberty brought him back to the country, where his father was residing. In this seclusion he gave himself up entirely to the study of the Greek and Latin authors. A friend reproached him for wasting his time in order to satisfy his curiosity, when he might have embraced some profession useful to society: he replied, that it was not from curiosity he spent his time in this way, but to make himself fitter for the profession he should embrace.

In his retirement he indulged likewise his love of poetry. He composed, in 1624, the dramatic piece entitled the *Masque of Comus*, a kind of poetry for which he had found a model in several early Italian dramatic works. This piece, which was set to music and executed, is one of the least considerable of his

compositions. In 1637 he composed his *Lycidas*, a poem in Latin verse, written on the death of one of his friends, and in which, in the midst of his grief, he bursts out suddenly in the liveliest indignation against the corruption of the clergy, and against a mercenary pastor whom he accuses of growing fat at the expense of his flock. It has been supposed that the object of this invective was Archbishop Laud, whose tragic end he appears in certain lines to foretell.

He was seized with a desire to add to the knowledge he obtained from books in his retirement, the knowledge which is the fruit of travel. He had recently lost his mother; he requested his father's permission to travel, obtained it, and set out in April 1638.

He came first to Paris, where he made the acquaintance of Grotius. His longing, however, to behold Italy suffered him to remain in France but a short time. He proceeded to Florence, where he sought the friendship of its men of letters, who soon recognised his merit.

From Florence he went to Rome, where he studied its antiquities, sculpture, painting and music, and became an intimate of Holstenius, the librarian of the Vatican. He perfected himself in the Italian tongue, and composed some verses in it, which were esteemed. At Naples he easily obtained the friendship of the Marquis Villa, the patron of poetry and of poets, of Tasso and of Marini: the

nobleman named by Tasso in the twentieth book of his *Jerusalem*, and to whom he dedicated his *Dialogue on Friendship*. The Marquis, then very old, received with alacrity a young foreigner, a lover of the Muses; and Milton in gratitude addressed him in an eclogue which he entitled *Mansus*.

In this poem he entreats him not to scorn a muse who, from a climate so unfavourable to poetry, has flown to Italy. He assures him that England, which gave birth to the Druids, is not a land where Apollo is despised. Nay, he continues, we have heard swans singing upon our Thames by night. And because the Marquis had caused a bust of Marini to be executed, Milton prays that he may one day find such a friend.

In the same eclogue it may be observed that Milton had already conceived the notion of becoming the Tasso of his country, and that King Arthur was the hero he had then in view. I shall return to these lines.

He designed a journey through Sicily and Greece, when he learned that war was threatening in England between King and Parliament; and he thought himself no longer justified in wasting his time among foreigners, while his countrymen were fighting for liberty. The Marquis Villa, when he went to take leave, advised him to be more prudent in Rome, whither he was returning, than he had been at setting out. He had there made enemies by the boldness of his discourse on religion, perhaps also on

the famous Galileo, then languishing in the prisons of the Inquisition, where Milton had visited him. But as he took a pride in speaking his mind freely, the counsel was given in vain, like that of an English friend who had recommended him at parting to keep, while he was in foreign countries, "his thoughts close and his countenance loose". Still, however, if he was not wise enough to put this precept in practice, he had at least the wisdom to remain but a short time at Rome, where his stay might shortly have become dangerous.

After fifteen months' absence he returned to England, where he learned of the death of his close friend Carlo Deodati, born of an Italian father and an English mother, and who had long been resident in London. In the Latin poem which he composed on the occasion, he reproaches himself with a journey to behold the ruins of Rome, since even to see her in her greatness, and such as she was in Virgil's time, he ought not to have quitted a friend like Carlo Deodati.

Being charged, on his return, with the guardianship of his nephews, he determined to be himself their preceptor; and as he taught them history and the tongues, several of his friends desired him to admit their children to these lessons. He agreed to it; and for this reason Saumaise later reproached him with having been a schoolmaster. Saumaise, who meant to insult him by the accusation, had not reflected that honest men would have esteemed Milton

more highly as a schoolmaster than as a writer against kings.

In the retirement of his study he resolved to take part as a scholar in the civil war; and seeing the bishops' authority weakened, he believed it in his power to deliver men from their yoke. He therefore composed his treatise on the *Reform of Church Government*, and other works against episcopacy: announcing a hope that these efforts to establish liberty in the Church would lead him to procure for his countrymen a like liberty in the State.

Nor was it in Church and State only that he aspired to a complete freedom; he desired it for every individual in his own house. This he made known by his works on divorce, the cause of which was as follows:

Milton, though opposed to every tie, had engaged himself in that of marriage. In 1643 he had united himself to Mary Powell, the daughter of a justice of peace in the county of Oxford. This young woman, a month after the union, wished to return to her family in the country, and desired his permission: he gave it, with the condition that she should return to him at an appointed time. The time arrived, but not the woman. He charged her to return, in a letter to which she did not reply. He dispatched letter upon letter; all were unanswered. Finally, he sent a messenger to demand her return. His ambassador was dismissed with contempt; whether it were that this woman, whose family was attached to the royal

cause, was resolved to live no longer with a republican; or that his person displeased her, and she preferred the diversions of her home in the country to the empty house of a scholar absorbed in his books. Milton, irritated by this contempt of his authority, determined to put her away, and even to take another wife. To prove himself justified, he composed a pamphlet on divorce, in which he went so far as to assert that marriage being designed for a state of happiness and quiet, opposition of humours alone affords sufficient reason for dissolving it; that it is useless to cry liberty abroad, if each man is in his own house the slave of the weaker sex; and that every husband is therefore free to put away a wife whose humour accords not with his own and take another. This production appeared without the author's name; but it was commonly said to be from Milton's pen, and in the second edition he owned it without disguise. He addressed it to the Parliament, representing that, as it was assembled for the reformation of the kingdom, it ought not to neglect the question of domestic discord, and the liberty of the individual. His doctrine was denounced as new and unorthodox; he therefore composed, in 1644, another pamphlet which he entitled *Tetrachordon*, and in which he expounded to his own liking four passages of the Holy Scripture on divorce.

These writings were ill received by the public. He complains of it in two of his sonnets, ascribing it to his countrymen's coldness in the cause of

liberty, though at a time when they were fighting for it. The clergy attacked him violently; and one of their number, preaching on a day of penance before several members of the Parliament, represented to them that among the sins for which they were to ask pardon of God ought to be placed that of omitting to command the burning of Milton's work on divorce by the hand of the hangman. A Presbyterian composed a pamphlet against him which made him as much the enemy of the Presbyterians as he had hitherto been their friend.

In the course of this dispute he was writing also on other subjects; a letter on the education of children, to define the authority of the father over his family; and his *Areopagitica*, a work which proves that he carried his love of liberty to the point of extravagance. He addressed to the Parliament this production, in which he advances that the State should leave to every writer an entire liberty to print what he chooses; that there was never a tyrant monstrous enough to prescribe limits to such liberty; limits which enslave truth, discourage learning and perpetuate ignorance; and that, therefore, the freedom of printing is the foundation of every freedom.

In 1645 he published a collection of his poems, Latin and English; among which were his *Allegroso* [*sic*] and his *Penseroso*, poems which have been translated into our tongue.

To the arguments he had adduced in his writings

on divorce, to prove that a husband may not only put away his wife, but take another, he now resolved to add his example. He sought in marriage a young woman remarkable for her beauty and wit; the news alarmed his wife, who at once grew desirous to be reconciled with him, and was encouraged in it by her family; for since the King's reverses they felt no longer impelled to parade their aversion. Milton went often to the house of a friend, where his wife resolved to surprise him. In the course of a visit there, he suddenly beheld her issuing from a room hard by and coming towards him with arms outstretched. His first movement was to repulse her; she cast herself at his feet, and bursting into tears conjured him to forgive her. This is the scene he has described between Adam and Eve in his tenth book. The sight of a woman whom he had once loved on her knees before him melted his anger. He forgot the proofs of contempt she had given him, the charming young woman who was to have been the means of his revenge, and all that he had written on the subject of divorce. The past was forgiven, the reconciliation was sincere, and as his wife's family had lost all they possessed at the death of Charles I., he even received into his house the father, mother, brothers and sisters of his wife, who, a year after his reconciliation with her, bore him a daughter; and this first-fruit of a marriage so unhappily begun was followed by several others.

He had been occupied with his private studies till

the tragic end of Charles I., and had kept silence on all that had taken place during the trial of that unhappy monarch; but when, after that horrid crime, he heard the Presbyterian ministers, who were not guiltless of it, lamenting its commission, when he beheld writings from their pen on the respect due to the sacred and inviolable person of a king, he designed to prove that this respect was not boundless, and composed in his own tongue the work entitled *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*. In it he maintained that it is lawful to bring a tyrant to trial, to depose him, and even to put him to death; and he advanced, possibly with justice, that those who were crying out loudest on the fate of Charles I. were those who had had the greatest share in it. After this work, which he published in 1649, he composed observations on the articles of peace between the Earl of Ormond and the Irish rebels.

He next undertook a general history of England; but could not proceed beyond the fourth book, being sought out by Cromwell and named Latin Secretary to the Council of State for Foreign Affairs. After Cromwell and his son, he held this office for the Parliament till the restoration of Charles II.; and in Cromwell's lifetime he held it, both as Secretary to the Council of State established by the Parliament and as Secretary to Cromwell, who had chosen him because he did not believe a better Latinist could be found in the country.

Cromwell had established this office, that the

honour of the English nation might not be debased by writing to the other nations of Europe in their own tongue. He therefore determined that they should be addressed in Latin only, and that their replies should not be received but in the same tongue: Latin being, as he declared, the common language of Europe. The English author of Milton's *Life* observes that it would have been well for the kings who succeeded Cromwell to continue this practice, "because", he says, "the universality of the French tongue seems to conduct that nation to the universal monarchy".

Milton exercised this employment with great zeal. He once, by the means of a friend in Holland, contrived to obtain a copy of the instructions of a plenipotentiary to be sent from that country to Cromwell; and a reply to the conditions of the Dutch was dispatched to Holland before their ambassador arrived in England.

It was during the time Milton held this office that he lost his sight; and, an ambassador one day complaining to Cromwell that he was kept long waiting for his answer: "The secretary", replied Cromwell, "has not yet dispatched it, because, as he is blind, he works slowly". "But why", exclaimed the astonished ambassador, "choose a blind man for such a place? He is obliged to dictate; and secrets, in consequence, can be no longer secret. What! when an official is required who can write Latin, is there no one to be found in all England but a blind

man?" To Milton, because he worked for Cromwell, have been attributed the Protector's Latin letter on the reasons of the war against Spain, and the Latin verses he sent to Queen Christina.

The employment of Secretary to the Council of State did not prevent Milton from composing several works. He was charged by the Parliament with the refutation of the pamphlet entitled *Icon Regia*, which, appearing under the name of the dead king, had produced among the people the effect of Caesar's bloody robe, when Antony displayed it to the Roman populace. Milton, who entitled his refutation *Eikonoklastes*, protested that he wrote with no design of insulting the shades of a king; but he preferred to the interests of King Charles those of Queen Truth. He maintained, besides, that Charles I. was not the author of the work he refuted; and time has justified his assertion.

Milton then composed the most famous of his prose works, entitled, *Defence of the English People*, against Saumaise, who had published the pamphlet entitled *Defence of Kings*, in favour of Charles I. His health was at that time very bad; he had already lost the sight of one eye, and the doctors threatened him with the loss of the other if he continued to work. Consulting only his zeal, or rather his fanaticism for the cause of liberty, he nevertheless applied himself to this production, the completion of which was delayed by his infirmity till 1651. It was thought strange that Saumaise, the pensioner of a republic,

should write in favour of monarchy, and Milton, born subject to a king, against it. His book, written in a manner which earned him the name of "good defender of a bad cause", was burnt by the hangman at Paris and Toulouse, and editions of it multiplied in consequence, while that of Saumaise had scarce any readers. It is said that Queen Christina, at whose Court he was then residing, despised it, and relished Milton's, so that he left her in great discontent. He died soon after, leaving a reply to Milton's work, which did not appear till after the restoration of Charles II. His prompt decease caused Milton, who had been told that Saumaise boasted of having cost him his sight, to reply, "But I have cost him his life".

It was, indeed, in the course of this dispute that he lost the sight of his other eye; and, notwithstanding the doctors had long threatened him with it, his enemies gave out that Heaven had punished with blindness the man who wrote against the authority of kings.

At the same period his first wife died in child-birth. He soon afterwards took a second, who also died in child-birth in the first year of their marriage. Whatever his misfortunes, however, he was so far from ascribing them to the wrath of God that he believed himself deserving the rewards of heaven; for he asserted that by all his writings on behalf of liberty he had defended the cause of God and his country.

The death of Saumaise did not put an end to the controversy on the rights of kings. A work entitled *Cry of the Royal Blood towards Heaven against the English Parricides*, appeared in 1651. It had been composed by a canon of Canterbury, who at his death bequeathed his papers to Saumaise; Saumaise had given them to Morus, a French minister, who published this work. Milton replied by another entitled *Second Defence of the English People*, which he filled with the bitterest invectives against Morus. Disputes between men of letters were then far removed from that humanity which ought to be inspired by the studies called *Humaniores*.

Soon after the death of Cromwell, though he perceived that all was tending to the restoration of the royal family, he resolved, though without hope, to make a last effort in favour of expiring liberty; and, still bold in his republicanism, composed a work entitled *The Best Way of Establishing a Free Commonwealth and its Excellence Compared to the Dangers of Royalty*.

When he saw that the cause for which he had combated with so much zeal would shortly be fatal to its partisans, and that Charles II. would ere long be upon the throne, he abandoned his post of Secretary to the Council, and had no course left but to retire into private life. Could he look, however, to be unmolested after all that he had written against Charles I. and his exiled family? He was

scarcely less guilty than those who had dipped their hands in the royal blood. His good fortune, rather than the clemency of Charles II., preserved him.

His *Defence of the English People* was at this time, with his *Eikonoklastes*, burnt by the common hangman, and himself arrested and placed under the guard of a sergeant; it is not easy, therefore, to comprehend how this declared enemy of crowned heads could have been spared at a time when the royal party were avenging the honour of kings. He was forgotten, it has been said. The proceedings against his books and his person are proofs of the contrary; and though the king had been willing to spare him, the Parliament, with which all decisions rested, sought only to immolate victims to the royal authority.

Its decree against Milton and two of his works, by which it appears that Milton should have been arrested, but was not found, is dated the 27th of June 1660; and Milton's complaint before the House of Commons, alleging that the sum claimed by the sergeant to whose charge he had been confided was in excess of his right, is of the 17th of December ensuing. It is certain, therefore, that Milton, who should have been arrested in the month of June, escaped at that time, because he was in hiding; that he was arrested subsequently, and was free six months after. It is certain besides that his request to the House of Commons, dated the 17th of

December, was relegated to the Committee of Privileges, and that Parliament was dissolved twelve days later, that is, on the 29th day of the same month; and finally, that Milton, who had not been excepted from the general amnesty, was never in danger of his life. But in order to comprehend this astonishing indulgence, we are compelled, as it seems to me, in the obscurity which surrounds the incident, to credit Richardson's account, which he had from Pope, who claimed to have learnt it from Betterton, a comedian who had enjoyed the protection of Sir William D'Avenant.

This D'Avenant had been sent on a mission to Charles I. by Queen Henrietta Maria; in the year 1650 he was arrested by the parliamentarians and in danger of his life. Milton, whose influence was at that time considerable, caused him to be set free; and in 1660 his own life was the reward of preserving D'Avenant's, who, through his influence with Charles II., was of such service to him that he escaped the severity of the Parliament in a manner which even now perplexes our understanding. He issued from this great danger so proud that when the sergeant who had kept him a prisoner demanded his fee, Milton had the audacity to complain to the Parliament of the sum demanded of him for his imprisonment.

It has been related that this man, too happy in preserving his life and liberty, might, if he had chosen, have resumed his office as Secretary to the

Council of State; that it was offered him; and that his third wife, Elizabeth Minshull, was urgent with him to accept it; but he replied: "You are a woman, and wish to keep a coach; but I wish to live and die an honest man".

This stubborn republican, seeing himself under the necessity of enduring the royal authority, ceased writing on public matters and returned to the pursuit of literature. He undertook a new *Thesaurus of the Latin Tongue*, in the manner of Robert Etienne's. What was found after his death appeared too imperfect to be made public, but was of great service to the authors of the *Cambridge Dictionary*. In 1661 he published his *Treatise on Grammar*.

Though the Court of Charles II. passed as loving poetry, as it loved only licentious poetry, an author of Milton's years, writing upon a sacred subject, could make no figure there: and, moreover, Milton's talent for poetry was almost unknown, as well at the Court as throughout the country, where he was known only as the author of the different works I have mentioned.

Though forgotten by the Court, he doubtless rejoiced in that oblivion, which was our good fortune no less than his; for he made use of the leisure, so necessary to a poet, to put the last touches to *Paradise Lost*, his favourite work. He was used to say that he had written it with his right hand, and all his other productions with the left. He had in his youth conceived the idea of treating this subject so

that it may be said no poem was ever meditated so long. It is astonishing that he should have so long delayed giving himself up to it entirely; but he sacrificed all to his zeal for the defence of liberty, imagining it a charge laid on him by Heaven. When at length he could do no more for it he returned to the Muses, with the determination to obtain by their means a glory of which he had been early enamoured.

His conversations at Naples with the Marquis Villa, of which Tasso had been the theme, had aroused in him the ambition, by some work of the same kind, to set his fame soaring beyond his own island, where he regarded himself as entombed. It cannot be doubted that his design was to take King Arthur for the hero of his poem; he affirms it in the Latin poem entitled *Epitaphium Damonis*, in which he writes:

> Ipse ego Dardanias Rutupina per aequora puppes
> Dicam, et Pandrasidos regnum vetus Inogeniae,
> Brennumque Arviragumque duces, priscumque Belinum,
> Et tandem Armoricos Britonum sub lege colonos;
> Tum gravidam Arturo fatali fraude Iogernen;
> Mendaces vultus, assumptaque Gorlöis arma,
> Merlini dolus.

Happily, to Merlin and his marvels, which he might be pardoned for admiring in youth, he preferred the simplicity of the subject afforded by Adam and Eve. It has been asserted, but without proof, that an Italian farce on the same subject first

suggested it to his mind. All that is certain is that he intended at first to make a tragedy out of it; and fragments of an attempt in that form, written in his own hand, are among the manuscripts preserved at the University of Cambridge.

These manuscripts have made us acquainted with all the poetical works he designed to undertake. Among them are to be found the titles and sometimes the plan of several tragedies he was to compose; the subjects of almost all are drawn from the Holy Scriptures, as Paradise Lost, Abraham and Isaac, Sodom (the scene to be at the door of Lot's house), Thamar, the Golden Calf, David and Bathsheba, Solomon, Naboth, Athalia, etc. Reading these titles, we might suppose that his design was to put the whole Bible into tragedies. Happily he fixed on the first subject, and treated it in the epic form.

In his book on *Church Government*, published in 1641, he had announced this poem by his promise to employ his poetic genius for his country, provided, as he wrote, "that the Land had once enfranchised herself from this impertinent yoke of prelacy, under whose tyrannical inquisition no free wit can flourish". He promised at the same time that his poem should not savour of the heat of youth or of the vapours of wine, being a work, as he wrote, "not to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her Siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit who can enrich with all

utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallow'd fire of his Altar to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases". This style of writing ought not to surprise us; the example of Cromwell, whom he admired, was his encouragement to give way to an enthusiasm, without which he might have been less sublime. We learn, from the accounts of his widow, that he was seriously persuaded of a divine influence directing the productions of his muse. He claimed to hear an inner voice animating him continually to proceed with this work, to which, however, he did not give an entire attention till he had leisure for it in the indifference of Charles II.'s Court.

His nephew, Phillips, related that Milton's poetical imagination served him only from the autumnal to the spring equinox; at other seasons, however he might labour to put it in motion, it furnished nothing that satisfied him; so that, though he declared himself to have been thirty years composing his poem, these thirty should not be reckoned but as fifteen. Others assert that Phillips was mistaken as to the season, for Milton, in a Latin elegy on the approach of spring, renders thanks to that season, in which his poetic genius will awake, and his vein begin to flow. He was young at the time of writing it; and age may perhaps have altered the impression which the seasons made upon his genius. The inequalities of his poem leave no doubt but that he composed some parts of it when his imagination, on

account of the season, served him ill, or when he was clouded by the melancholy occasioned by the restoration of Charles II. This melancholy is clearly to be seen, when at the opening of his seventh book he complains of being fallen on evil days and evil tongues:

> In darkness, and with dangers compassed round
> And solitude—

and when, in the same lament, he compares the favourites of Charles II. to the race

> Of that wild rout that tore the Thracian bard
> In Rhodope.

He feared to perish like Orpheus, seeing himself surrounded with the enemies he had made by his writings against the royal family; this fear disturbed his slumbers, and caused him to live in frequent terror of assassination. We learn the grief and disquiet in which the close of his life was passed, from a poem written against him, in which he is addressed as "parricide of his king, who, though by the clemency of Charles II. he has escaped the hand of justice, has escaped only for a heavier chastisement". Old, infirm, poor, sightless, and driven to write for bread, he is bidden, "if he would gain a livelihood, to recall Saumaise from the dead". He is insulted in these terms because, being oppressed with age and disease, tormented by the gout, blind, and too poor to pay the charges of a copyist, he was

unable to compose a work which should obtain him as much money as his writings against Saumaise. He himself learnt this when he attempted to sell his *Paradise Lost*.

In 1655 he completed this poem, and communicated it to his friend Elwood, a celebrated Quaker, who, when he had read it, owned his astonishment that Milton should have composed such a work while oppressed with infirmities and advanced in years. He knew not that the poem was the fruit of many years' labour.

To obtain leave to print it, Milton was obliged to submit to a yoke he abhorred, and against which he had written: examination, namely, by a censor who proved hard to satisfy. Such was the common opinion of the author, that this official thought he discerned in every line some lurking venom, some satirical stroke aimed at the government and the royal authority; and he imagined he had detected the crime of high treason in that noble passage of the first book, where the poet compares the darkened radiance of Satan to that of the sun during an eclipse, which:

> disastrous twilight sheds
> On half the nations, and with fear of change
> Perplexes monarchs.

These hesitations of the censor alarmed the booksellers when the author wished to sell his copyright. One, however, was bold enough to purchase

it, and agreed with Milton to pay him ten pounds should the sale not reach a certain number of copies, and five pounds more if it attained that number. He made the same bargain for the second and third editions. The contract, dated the 27th of May 1667, has been preserved along with the manuscript bearing the censor's imprimatur. It is in several hands, because Milton had not always the same copyist. In its first edition, which appeared in 1667 in quarto, the poem remained in the bookseller's shop as private as it had been in the manuscript of the author. In several copies, indeed, a preliminary payment is recorded, with the announcement of a new edition in 1668 and the name of a new printer; and a third edition in 1669 with that of a third printer. But by an artifice which publishers sometimes employ to make it appear that a book is finding purchasers, under the name of new editions, the same edition reappeared in a disguise which did not advance the sale of it. The author was yet unknown but by prose works in favour of a cause entirely lost. He was despised at the Court of Charles II. The subject of his poem was not such as excited curiosity; and the poem itself was unrhymed. The English had not yet seen in their tongue a poem without rhyme.

In 1670 Milton composed his tragedy of *Samson*; a subject which pleased him because it displayed Samson blind like himself in the midst of his enemies the Philistines. About the same time he composed

his poem entitled *Paradise Regained*, and which, it may be remarked, was not printed by the same bookseller who had printed *Paradise Lost*. Doubtless this bookseller, dissatisfied with his former purchase, though made at so easy a rate, was unwilling to undertake more poems by Milton.

The idea of composing a poem on Paradise regained was inspired by the jest of a friend, who had been asked his opinion of *Paradise Lost*. "It is well lost," he replied, "how are we to recover it?" On hearing this, Milton fell into a brief musing, and conceived the design of writing a poem on the subject. Some persons have observed that it is a work of old age, but the old age of Milton. Those, however, who have declared that Milton is not to be found in *Paradise Regained*, judged it more justly. The poem is scarce more than a dialogue, without action, and without interest; and the subject even is incomplete, for Paradise is not yet regained after Christ's resistance to the temptations in the wilderness. It is impossible to read it through.

In 1672 Milton published a work on logic, his *Treatise on Religion*, and on the means of preventing the progress of papism. He was its declared enemy; and in his *Treatise on Religion* he opens the gates of heaven to all Christians, of whatever sect, except the Roman Catholics. He composed also a short *History of Muscovie*, which was not printed till after his death.

Our poet must have beheld with grief the poem

which, as he had all his life been confident, was to wing his fame beyond the sea, languishing on the shelves of his bookseller. It was perhaps in the hope of giving it a perfection which he believed wanting that he resolved to put it into twelve books. He accordingly made two books out of the seventh, and, with some additions, two of the last. When he had made these changes, which, instead of increasing, detracted from the merit of the work, he caused it to be reprinted in octavo. But when this edition, completed in 1674, at last appeared, he was dead. Sinking even more under griefs than infirmities, he succumbed to an attack of gout in November 1674, and was buried by his father's side; not until 1737 had he the honours of a monument at Westminster.

As the second edition of his *Paradise Lost* did not appear, as I have said, till after his death, it has been concluded that he received from the bookseller only the price agreed on for the first edition. The price of the second was doubtless paid to his widow; who, being now mistress of the copyright, sold it in perpetuity to a bookseller by an agreement dated the 21st of December 1680; and he became absolute owner of it for about twenty pistoles of our money.

It cannot be said of Milton, that so soon as death had razed him from the number of the living,

> On reconnut le prix de sa muse éclipsée.

His muse had preceded him to the grave, and re-

mained there after him; she owed her resurrection to the Earl of Dorset, who, turning over books in the shop where lay *Paradise Lost*, came upon this poem, which was unknown to him, and opened it. The bookseller begged he would read it, and speak well of it afterwards, to obtain him purchasers. The Earl sent it to Dryden, then a young man, who returned it with the observation: "This man is the superior of us all, ancients and moderns". This panegyric did not, however, make the fortune of the poem, which was extremely slow; for the Duke of Buckingham, in his *Essay on Poetry*, deigned not to compare Milton to Spenser; the Earl of Rochester said he knew of no great English poet but Cowley; and Sir William Temple, in the *Miscellanies*, which he published in 1686, gave great praise to Ariosto, Tasso, and Spenser, but said nothing of Milton.

Readers were repelled by a poem without rhyme; at length they grew accustomed to it. Three editions of *Paradise Lost* appeared in folio; one in 1688, the next in 1692, and the last in 1695. The poem had then not readers only, but commentators; Addison, by his essays in the *Spectator*, confirmed its reputation, which increased continually; editions multiplied. In 1732 Bentley produced one like that of a classical author, with corrections even bolder than he has made in Horace; for he thought himself justified in rejecting every line which displeased him, on the ground that the blind poet had confided the revision of the work to a perfidious friend,

who had inserted many lines of his own; so that, as he said, "Paradise has been twice lost". He maintained that the proofs of the first edition were not read to Milton, who, unless he had been deaf as well as blind, would not have suffered faults so gross to pass uncorrected. This tale has no appearance of veracity, and Bentley's edition was despised in his own country. In 1734 the Richardsons, father and son, produced their notes to the poem, which was translated in prose into several tongues. Two translations have been made in Latin verse, and in 1755 it was proposed to publish by subscription a translation into Greek, with observations. And to conclude, in the cabinets of English amateurs the bust of Milton was placed beside that of Homer and of Virgil; and as all wished to be acquainted with the physiognomy of so celebrated a person, they desired likewise to be informed of his manners, his character, and his religion.

His enemies, taunting him in his lifetime with his ugliness and small stature, had applied to him this line of Virgil:

> Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum—

adding that *ingens* was the one word in the line by which he could not be described, being, as Saumaise had written, *delicatum et infirmum corpusculum*. Milton had replied that he was of a middle rather than a small stature; that in youth, and with his

sword by his side, he had not feared the robustest enemy; and that at no time of his life had he been called ugly. In his youth he had been of uncommon beauty, both in face and figure; neither tall nor short; his hair parted on the forehead, and falling in curls to his shoulders; he drew his own picture in that of Adam (Book 6). He had fine eyes, without any appearance of defect. After he had lost his sight, those who knew not his misfortune could not, when they encountered him, have suspected it. His conversation was affable, and it has been asserted that his disposition was mild. This mildness does not appear in his controversial writings; the blame must be given to the taste then prevailing among the learned.

His heart was naturally tender. This may be judged by the scene I have related, and which took place between his wife and himself: it may be judged also by the tenderness, so much admired, in the relations of Adam and Eve. On this account, perhaps, and prompted either by discretion or a love of liberty, he shunned all occasions which might have surprised him into love.

At the age of nineteen (if the fact be authentic) he beheld, when walking abroad, a young woman who was unknown to him, but whose beauty struck him with such force that he at once fell in love with her. He lost sight of her a moment after, and could never find her afterwards, nor learn who she was. The impression she had made on him convinced

him of his weakness, and he vowed to love no more. He might have said, therefore, with Burrhus:

On n'aime point, Seigneur, si l'on ne veut aimer.

His true passion was that of learning. He had studied history, the mathematics, philosophy, theology, and the tongues, ancient and modern. He was master of French, Spanish, and Italian, which he put far above French; but this should not astonish us; our good writers had not then appeared. His principal study, however, was the Holy Scripture, a chapter of which he read every morning in Hebrew. After the Bible, his favourite book was Homer, whom he had almost by heart. He would have translated him, but had an aversion for the kind of work, which is opposed to an original genius.

The gout, which he suffered more impatiently than his blindness, had attacked in his person one of the soberest of men. He drank scarce any wine, and ate none but the simplest foods, in quantity just sufficient to satisfy necessity. He always loved bodily exercises, especially fencing; and when he had lost his sight, he caused a machine to be made, in which he used to swing, that his body might not be entirely without exercise. He rose very early, studied till dinner, and after dinner recreated himself by singing, or playing on some instrument; he possessed a fine voice, and was skilled in music. After a few more hours given to study, in the even-

ing he ate two or three olives, drank a glass of water, smoked his pipe and retired to bed.

It was during the night that he composed his poem, which he declared to be inspired by a heavenly muse. When he had composed a certain number of lines, he rang a bell; his wife or one of his daughters came down to him; he dictated his lines; and often, when he had dictated forty, he would reduce them to twenty the next day.

He had three daughters, whom he taught to read and pronounce correctly eight languages which they did not understand. He was accustomed to say, that one tongue was enough for a woman; but he wished his daughters to be capable of reading to him when he required it. We know from their accounts that the books he read oftenest were Isaiah in Hebrew, Homer in Greek, and the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid in Latin.

He remained a firm republican, not all the enemies he had made by his vicious political principles ever causing him a moment's repentance: he gloried in having been always a fearless defender of what he was wont to call the good old cause. His attachment to Cromwell did not belie his principles; he regarded him as the man who had freed his country from the monarchy, and hoped he would free it likewise from ecclesiastical domination; an aim which he recommends to him in one of his sonnets.

We are told that he believed in God; but how did he believe, and what worship did he pay to Him?

These are embarrassing questions. His English biographer, while maintaining that he cannot justly be suspected of irreligion, acknowledges that he gave no outward sign of religion, whether in public or in private. A Puritan in his youth, he ranged himself, for the sake of freedom, among the Independents and the Anabaptists; and at length, to be freer yet, he resolved to be no longer of any sect, maintaining that religion ought to be internal. He became a Quietist and an enthusiast; deplorable end of an uncommon genius, who, though his mind was full of the Holy Scriptures, which he read every day, drew no profit from them than as they familiarised his imagination with the sublime. He laboured all his life to announce in a sacred poem the truths of religion and its morality, especially obedience, and at the same time, refusing to submit to any kind of authority, declared himself an enemy of that of his king and of his church, and even of the yoke to which he had voluntarily submitted himself in marriage; and believed himself dispensed from giving, by any external sign of religion, a proof that he possessed one.

As he was obliged, at the end of his life, to sell his library, and to make with a bookseller a humiliating agreement, which augured ill for the immortality he looked for from his poem, it is impossible to doubt that he was poor. He is reproached with it in the lines quoted above. But anger blinded his enemies. A man who had enjoyed the favour of

Cromwell, and issued poor from the office of secretary to the Council of State, was a man who despised riches. It is clear from his description of the god Mammon, in his first and second books, in what contempt he held a god who has yet never lacked, and will never lack, worshippers.

OBSERVATIONS ON "PARADISE LOST"

OBSERVATIONS ON "PARADISE LOST"

The poem, of which I am giving a new version in the French language, was still-born. Two years after it was first printed, the bookseller had not yet sold a copy. He therefore desired an English nobleman to read it, and speak of it so as to awaken curiosity. The nobleman passed it on to Dryden, who read it, and returned it with the observation, "This man is the superior of us all, ancients and moderns". Dryden later spoke of the poem, at different times, with admiration and with contempt. His first pronouncement did not make its fortune, for it is certain that the poem remained unknown some years longer, as I have related in the *Life* of the author.

Milton at length issued from the darkness in which he had been so long confined, and was publicly acclaimed the English Homer. The honours then paid him by his countrymen were so great, that it seemed as though, to repair the excess of their indifference and contempt, they feared not to fall into the opposite extreme.

According to some, Nature first brought forth Homer and Virgil, and then exhausted her powers by uniting these two poets to form a third—Milton. Others declared that whoever hears the voice of Milton will be convinced that Homer sang only of frogs and Virgil of gnats.

The extravagance of these encomiums might be imputed to the zeal which a nation commonly displays for a poet of its own. But when we observe this poet on his appearance among other nations, shortly to obtain admirers there, and not a few of them in our midst, we cannot doubt but that he owes them to uncommon merits. When I first read him in our tongue, I was unacquainted with him in his own; yet I was so much inflamed by what I read, that I put into verse several passages, which will be found among my notes; not because I am always satisfied with them, but because I have already given them to the public in my *Reflexions on Poetry*, in which, speaking of this poem, I said it "abounded with beauties and extravagances".

What I then said I say again, after studying it in the original tongue. My vision is unaltered. I see the same beauties and the same extravagances, but a more attentive and enlightened study of the first has rendered me much more indulgent to the second.

This astonishing inequality was in part the cause of the slowness with which the poem made its way. Its absurdities are immediately striking, and striking

to all. Its beauties are not so striking, and are at first invisible to many. A poet is more sensible of them than any other person, and Pope was accordingly an admirer of Milton. Yet his admiration was not without reserve, as appears by the following lines:

> Milton's strong pinion now not Heaven can bound,
> Now serpent-like in prose he sweeps the ground.
> In quibbles Angel and Archangel join
> And God the Father turns a school divine.

Milton must be allowed to be a sublime poet, the sublimest of all poets since Homer. He is besides the most perfect epic poet since Homer; and it is astonishing that in a subject consecrated to the true religion, and in an epic poem which lives on fictions and the marvellous, he has succeeded in fixing the attention (what a glory to poetry!) without the aid of fables, of absurd machinery or of descriptions dangerous to morality. But the greater his excellence the more apparent are his faults. He is justly reproached with inequality. He soars to a great height, and immediately after, he grovels. It has been justly said that in his account of the battle of the angels, he mingles the frivolous with the lofty. We cannot forgive his *Paradise of Fools*. In this sacred subject, he does not indeed employ the agency of mythical powers, but he names them too frequently. He wearies the reader by the puerile ambition of displaying his learning on all topics, and

sometimes also by theological or philosophical harangues, ill-timed and not always clear.

Such are the faults of this poet. I am presently to say what should induce us to excuse some part of them, and to be very indulgent to all; but I begin by laying them all to his charge, to conclude, that his poem must therefore contain astonishing beauties, and that he can be no ordinary genius, since he has at length won from his countrymen homage so long refused, and the homage of the other nations, so soon as they were acquainted with him: and in what subject?

It is no fertile theme which affords on earth but two persons, a man and his wife. It announces neither arms nor the deeds of heroes, the common subjects of the epic: but a serpent persuading a woman to eat of a fruit, and the woman persuading her husband to eat of it likewise. The action is not sublime, for as M. Bossuet has written in his *Elevations*: "We are amazed by the weakness of this strange commandment. Every circumstance is weak; each has the appearance of fable. A serpent speaks. A woman listens. A man, rational and perfect, suffers himself to be seduced by the grossest of temptations. With him the whole human race falls into the power of sin and death. Does not all this appear folly?" No pleasing machinery is to be expected in an action conducted by Satan:

> Quel objet à présenter aux yeux
> Que le Diable toujours hurlant contre les Cieux!

Boileau was used to say that Tasso though he employs the agency of heroes famous in arms, would not have succeeded without his love passages, or if—

"Renaud, Tancrède et sa maîtresse
N'eussent de son sujet égayé la tristesse."

Milton's theme, though gloomier, never appears so, yet it is not enlivened in this manner. His description of two hearts united by tenderness is so chaste that it never occasions a voluptuous thought, and yet so amiable, that we had rather be with Milton in Eden than with Tasso in the Palace of Armida, or with Marini in the Garden of Venus.

How is it that Milton, without studying to divert us, pleases us more than Tasso or Marini? How does he succeed in interesting us, like Homer, in his fable, without, like Homer, dazzling by the most splendid of numbers in the most harmonious of tongues? even neglecting, as I shall show, the ornaments of style, and disdaining the harmony which, in his tongue, rhyme adds to poetry. It is because, to please us, he has done as Homer did, and no epic poet will ever succeed but by doing as Homer has done.

The perfect epic poem is the highest achievement of the human mind. Aristotle gives the palm to tragedy, because, being less extensive, the pleasure it excites is less languid. For that very reason the poet ought to be esteemed above all others, who,

"dans le vaste récit d'une longue action", fixes the attention of a reader or a listener, harder to retain than that of a spectator, so that, without a moment's languor, he reads or hears to the end. Such a poet, like the tragic poet, fixes the attention by the truth of his imitation, by the interest he arouses in the action and the pathos with which he adorns it.

This Milton has done. He has, like Homer, the principal charm of poetry, the truth of imitation. Like him, he has made his subject interesting, and like him, he has made it pathetic. I regard him therefore, except in his numbers, as the greatest epic poet since Homer.

Though he imitates objects of which nature in her present state could furnish him no model, his imitation appears so just that we are persuaded all his persons (always excepting God the Father) must have spoken as he makes them speak. The Son of God appears the Mediator, the Advocate, the Saviour of Mankind, in every speech that is put into his mouth. Satan surely said all that he says here. Adam and Eve surely spoke thus, both in their happiness and misfortune.

He is the only epic poet, since Homer, who has excited interest in his subject. This interest is, in Homer, so lively that I have known children, reading him in the French translation, prefer this book to any other written for their entertainment; because, having begun the *Iliad*, they wished to read to the end, to find out when Achilles would re-

appear, and if he would have his revenge. And when they had begun the *Odyssey*, they wished to read to the end, to find out how Odysseus would reveal himself and revenge himself on the wooers. At all ages we are children that must be amused. It is the business of the poet: let him learn his business not in treatises on poetry, but in Homer. The subject of an epic poem should interest, like that of a tragedy; yet when we read Virgil, who never fails to fix our attention by the beauty of his numbers, what interest do we feel in Achates, in Ascanius or even in his hero? Are we curious to learn if he will conquer Turnus, if he will marry Lavinia, if he will found his city? I say nothing of Camoens, because I do not reckon among epic poems a poem without action, which is but the account of a voyage, and in which heathen deities play absurd parts. When we read *Tasso*, are we concerned for Godfrey, or the siege of Jerusalem? Pleased by Erminia, Clorinda, Armida, we care little about the Christians wresting from the hands of infidels the tomb of Christ—"il gran sepolcro di Cristo". Milton, by the skill with which he develops his action, never loses our attention. From the beginning we eagerly expect the two happy creatures who are announced to us, and from the moment they appear on the scene till they leave it for ever, afflicted and consoled, we never take our eyes from them.

But Milton's greatest art is to have made this subject, in its simplicity, tragic, by the pity and

terror it inspires. While we do not excuse the act of disobedience so severely punished, we pity the guilty couple. Though the authors of all our woes, they excite our compassion, and we lament with them. When Adam deplores the frightful heritage he must bequeath to descendants, who in all ages will heap curses on his head, instead of cursing we mingle our tears with his. And to conclude, the poet excites terror and even (who could believe it?) a kind of pity for Satan, who is not the hero of his poem, as Dryden would have it, but the triumph of his genius, as I am presently to show.

To the poet who has made a subject, in itself barren and simple, so fertile and so interesting, I can forgive many faults. Those faults are great: and at times the *bonus dormitat* is not enough, we must rather say that he is in lethargy. I do not inquire if it be true, as his historians relate, that he composed some parts of his poem in seasons of the year when his imagination served him ill. I impute his misfortune, when he falls, to the heights he soars to.

Great minds only can achieve so high a flight, but human weakness cannot long sustain it. "Uncommon greatness," says Longinus, "has not the purity of the mediocre." The great is, by its very nature, slippery and dangerous. But, as Longinus equally observes, we do not admire a little flame whose radiance is always pure, and we are struck with admiration in contemplating the two great lights of heaven, though sometimes darkened by eclipse. Nor

is there anything in nature more astonishing than the furnaces of Mount Etna, who sometimes, from the depth of her abysses, throws up stones and rivers of flame. We must expect, when we read this poet, to see stones and ashes in the midst of his rivers of flame.

Thus I defend his inequalities. His other faults I impute to the climate and the age in which he lived.

He himself complained of a climate unfavourable to poetry, saying (Book 9) that he wrote,

"Damp'd by cold climate, and by years."

It is natural to expect that in cold countries cold poets should be found—*suoque simillima caelo ingenia.* Yet, what fire is in Milton!

When I consider the age in which he lived, I reckon it another merit that he had not more complacence for an age which loved puns, the problems of the schools, the subtleties of metaphysic, the mixture of sacred and profane. What examples were to be found, in poets famous in Italy, of absurd fictions, of theological and philosophical argument, and a language of love entirely opposed to love!

I say nothing here of the extravagant fictions of Dante, or of Sannazaro in a sacred poem. My example shall be taken from a discreeter poet—from Vida in his *Christiad.* At the moment when Christ on the Cross thus addresses his Father, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—because

God the Father makes no reply, and seems to have abandoned him—all the angels, who have suffered him to be nailed to the Cross, spring to his defence, though rather late. They rush to arms, one seizes his javelin, another his lance, one his bow, another his cestus; all have their swords hanging by their sides. They seem likely to perform great feats, when God the Father recalls them and asks what they are about; do they think He Himself wants power to save His Son? He could, if he chose, shake the earth, etc. Milton has not been guilty of fictions of the kind; his are never wanting in respect for divine majesty. In his account of events related by the Holy Scripture, he never deviates from it, nor adds anything inconsistent with it. As it says nothing of the fall of the angels, he indulges his poetic imagination on this subject; but he supposes that an angel, obliged to speak within human comprehension, paints spiritual things under corporeal images. Father Malebranche, who, though a bitter enemy to poetry, often writes in a manner truly poetical, says, to excuse certain images, that "it is permissible to embody Truth, to accommodate it to our weakness, and hold the attention of the mind, which cannot fix itself on that which has no substance". If a philosopher, therefore, finds himself under the necessity of embodying Truth, what privilege may not a poet claim? The battle of the angels would thus elude criticism were it not for some fictions and some speeches wanting in gravity.

Had the poet wished to revenge himself on his enemies by satirical attacks, how dangerous the example afforded him by the poet whom the Italians call their Homer! I mean Dante, who, abusing strangely the privilege he has assumed, of distributing places in Hell, writes with a pen dipped in the bitterest gall; who in Purgatory, and even in Heaven, forgets among the saints that the religion he celebrates commands forgiveness of injuries; who forgets, in speaking of the Popes of his day, that the son who exposes to his brothers their father's nakedness deserves his curse. Milton, who was not attached to the Court of Rome by the ties which should have been sacred to Dante, does not thus insult it. He has unhappily followed Dante in entering on theological and philosophical problems, but yet with more reserve. Dante, whose learning consisted in the dialectic of the schools, in peripatetic subtleties and a platonism ill understood, took his theology from Peter Lombard. Why, then, should we waste time in plumbing his mystic allegories? What does it signify, if prevenient grace be meant by his Lucia, or efficient grace by Beatrice, who quits the rose in which she sat in heaven by the holy Virgin, to be the guide of her beloved Dante, once her lover upon earth?

The poets of that age were so accustomed to the language of theology and philosophy that they had no other, even to write of love. I am unwilling to speak ill of Petrarch. His name is respectable to

every man of letters, since he first sought the keys of those chambers, where the manuscripts lay in dust, and ventured to insert them in the rusty locks. But he is known to have been accused of witchcraft because he read Virgil; he wrote, therefore, in an age when taste was unknown; when nothing was known but a subtle metaphysic, which makes Petrarch almost unintelligible, even in the three Canzoni, called by the Italians the three divine sisters, on his Laura's eyes. Mr. Muratori, in his book on the *Perfect Poetry*, acknowledges the obscurity, but styles it "a glorious obscurity, occasioned by the abundance of matter expressed in a few words, by the subtlety of the thoughts, the profundity of the doctrine, and the greatness of the erudition". What need, however, has a poet of all this doctrine, erudition, subtlety of thought, abundance of matter, when he is addressing his mistress's eyes? Petrarch does not make the same use as Milton of the Holy Scripture; he fills his love sonnets with extracts from the sacred books. When he is returning to Avignon, he exhorts the Rhone, which will be there before him, to tell Laura of his impatience to be with her. Though he travels slowly, he is not to blame; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. He was remarkable, as was customary at the time, both for love and piety, for his historians relate that he always rose at midnight, not like Milton to dictate verses, but to pray, and that he fasted thrice in the week. Yet he wrote incessantly of love, and

always in the same terms, and always in sonnets. The rigour of this form has been compared to that of the giant, who used to lay men at length upon his bed, breaking the legs of those who were too tall for it, and stretching those that were too short. Petrarch did something of the kind when he compelled himself to say in fourteen lines that he was all ice, etc.:

Perch' io tante versai lagrime e 'nchiostro.

It is probable that, to a poet who could write thus, love cost more ink than tears. I am therefore inclined to believe, what is related by several historians, that the Pope offered to release him from his ecclesiastical condition that he might marry Laura; but he replied, "I have still many sonnets to write". Indeed, if we may judge by Tassoni's account of the fair Laura, and by Palma's portrait, she was a peasant woman, remarkably coarse, ugly and ill-natured, and, in short, such as Dulcinea appeared to Sancho: so that Petrarch greatly exceeded the poet's privilege of lying when he declared that that masterpiece of heaven, when she showed herself, effaced the Sun. He wrote of love without feeling it. In Milton's poem, Adam and Eve, who truly love each other, speak the language of nature, and of nature in a state of innocence, it was surely thus that our first parents loved, and expressed their love in Eden.

If Milton is estimable for having resisted the

example of those Italian poets who receive, in their own country, encomiums which we have too often echoed, he is not less so for having rejected, as his models, our own early poets, who, like the author of the *Romaunt of the Rose*, long offered for our admiration allegories, mystical, theological, philosophical and amorous: and especially, in that he did not suffer himself to be dazzled by the incredible fortune of du Bartas, the subject of whose poem has some likeness to his own, and whom the English, unhappily for them, possess in a translation. Du Bartas's poem, *The Week*, had a fate very unlike that of *Paradise Lost*. It was honoured on its appearance by several editions, with learned commentaries, and by translations into Italian, Spanish, German, English and Danish. Ronsard, the president of our Parnassus, said he had not in his whole life done so much as du Bartas in a week. Du Bartas was sent as ambassador to James VI., King of Scotland, who himself translated several passages of the poem into the tongue which was then spoken in his kingdom. Yet this poet never uses the language of nature; he calls the sun the Duke of Candles; and to inform us that God, having created woman from a rib of man, blessed the union of man and woman, says:

D'un corps Dieu fit deux corps, puis de deux corps un corps.

Milton cannot, like almost all our early poets, be charged with using unnatural diction. Some

expressions, indeed, are unnatural, but they are few; and how many of the kind are to be found in Dante?

I return to this poet because I am exasperated by the pompous encomiums he has received not only from the Italians of a former age, who styled him "divine poet", and even "divinest theologian", but from the modern Italians, who should be able to discern more justly. He is again called divine by Gravina, who never mentions him but with the most respectful admiration. "The divine Dante", says Mr. Maffei, "is a perennial fountain of poetry, and his admirable poem is a proof of what can be achieved by the human mind in this art." How can such praise be given to a poet who excites neither terror in his Hell nor awe in his Heaven? His poem may be compared with the painting of the "Last Judgment", by Michelangelo, where some pleasing details may be found, but which wants the essential beauty, the majesty of the subject.

How should Dante have been a man of taste in an age when classical antiquity was unknown? He takes Virgil as a guide in his journey, but not in his poetry. His want of taste appears in his choice of the *terza rima*, which has not the dignity required by the subject, and which is not his own invention. He learned it from Brunetto Latini, who was the director of his studies, and whom he has placed in Hell. His want of taste appears again in the title of his poem, which he called a comedy, because it

is written in a common style; while he calls the *Aeneid* tragedy on account of the loftiness of the style.

Not satisfied with employing Hebrew, Greek, Latin and Low Latin words, he invents others, as "criich", in imitation of the noise made by ice when it splits. So unnatural are his images that he says he is old because the arch of his years is beginning to bend. He calls the skin the sheath of our limbs; water, the mirror of Narcissus; the sight, the chariot of looks; miracles, works which nature has not forged on her anvil. Meaning that our decisions should not be rashly made, he says we should put lead on our feet in order to move slowly from yea to nay. When he is afraid, he says that fear "fills the lake of his heart". An excellent simile, says Fontanini, as the poet, by the lake of the heart, evidently meant the pericardium!

Milton, who had read all these famous poets, as well as those ancient Romans whom our rich dilettanti buy so dear and never read, attached himself especially, his own taste inclining him to the sublime and just, to the Prophets and Homer; and thus, in a barbarous age, choosing a subject which not the greatest poet of our enlightened age would venture to undertake, he levelled a new road, and proved himself an original genius.

Yet it is precisely the title of original poet which has been refused him in his own country, where he has been called the greatest of plagiarists, and where

some have had the boldness to declare that he owed his riches to his thefts.

I do not allude to the collection of his imitations of classical authors published in England. Such imitations will raise him in the esteem of men of taste, who love to see the riches of antiquity transported among us by skilful hands, which can convey them without theft. I mean the collection of his imitations of modern authors.

The admirable design of his poem is here discovered in a paltry novel. It has been asserted that he found a mine of wealth in the indigence of our du Bartas; he is accused of borrowing (for the compiler supposes him to have had the patience to read these poets, if poets they are) from Masenius, Ramseius, Romaeus, Fletcherus, Straphorstius, Taubmannus, Quintianus, Malapertius, Fox, etc.

The person who has collected these imitations professes to have acted not in envy of Milton, but solely out of regard for truth. He is so far from envying the reputation of this poet, his countryman, that he proposes in his book a subscription for the relief of a granddaughter of Milton: "and this proposal", he continues, "ought to be well received, since it proceeds from me, who may be regarded as the Zoilus of the English Homer".

Milton was certainly an imitator, but in the manner in which original poets are imitators. His mind, formed, as I have said, on the Prophets and Homer, and accustomed to sublime images,

presently produced sublime images, which are his own. I shall give instances of this.

All the painters represent God the Father as a venerable old man. Sannazaro covers him with a robe woven by Nature, on which, working night and day, she has embroidered the marvels of creation. This robe he assumes when assembling his court. In Milton, his excessive light renders him invisible, except to his Son; only when alone with him is he unshrouded; but in the midst of the angels, who could not have sustained his brightness, he envelops himself in a cloud, and though he suffers only the extremity of his rays to appear beneath it, all heaven is dazzled, the seraphim cover their eyes with their wings. This God, magnificent in his glory and power, yet never appears so great in heaven as in the speeches which, in Hell, the demons make against him in their anger.

The painters represent God the Father as creating the world, and pronouncing judgment on our guilty parents in the presence of the angels. In Milton it is the Son, the Power of the Father, the Creator and Judge of the Universe, who performs both these offices; but with this difference that, when about to create the world, he sets forth with a magnificent escort; when he goes to perform the task of Judge, he goes alone, willing to spare sinners whom he loves the confusion of being condemned before witnesses.

The painters represent St. Michael overcoming

Satan. In Milton it is again the Son of God, as dreadful to the rebel angels as he is later tender and compassionate to guilty man. He advances, thunderbolts in his hand; beneath the wheels of his chariot all heaven trembles, except the Throne of God; a vast chasm yawns in the empyrean, disclosing the abyss. At the sight the rebel angels recoil; but, urged forward once more by their terror of the Son of God, who pursues them alone, unaccompanied by his angels, they cast themselves down, and, as they fall from heaven, conjure the abyss (as they themselves relate in Book 2) to receive them and shelter them from the wrath pursuing.

What an idea does Milton, by a very simple fiction, convey of the power of God, of the insignificance of the universe, and especially of this earth, on which we walk so proudly. Satan, on quitting the empire of Chaos, perceives in the distance a little globe. It is the universe, suspended by a chain to that side of the empyrean from which he had been hurled. How many such globes, how many universes might be suspended by similar chains to all sides of the empyrean if it pleased God! This globe, when Satan approaches it, appears very large; he walks to and fro on its surface, he finds an opening, dives into the midst of all the globes he finds there, and lands on that of the sun, where he learns the way to earth; he flies thither, and at length discovers man, lost, as it were, in a corner of the earth, which is itself lost in a corner of the universe.

What master had Milton, but his genius, when he described the first thoughts and the first emotions of Eve, the first thoughts and the first emotions of Adam, in the first moment of their existence? The reflections of the woman are not those of the man; the two pictures are very different, and equally just.

Can a poet, who has imagined scenes and incidents so novel, so beautiful and so sublime, be denied original genius? Is any proof of it required, beyond his Satan, whom I have called the masterpiece of his art?

He does not, like all painters and all other poets, make him a monster with horns and tail. His Satan is an angel, with the scars of thunder on his brow, but still with the appearance of an angel; he has even angelic rays, though their lustre is impaired. Few days have passed since his fall from heaven; and, as he still retains in his outward figure some traces of his beauty, so in his heart remain some traces of estimable feeling. He is the God of Evil; such is his choice; he has joyfully accepted his empire, but has not yet the strength requisite for the exercise of his new dignity. He ought to delight only in destruction; and, on the point of destroying what he cannot but admire, he hesitates, he feels remorse. Every view of beauty and happiness renews this sentiment by recalling his former state. Beholding the sun, he thinks of the glory he has lost and groans. He gazes with ecstasy on the beauties of Eden, because they recall those of heaven, now lost to him. At the sight

of our first parents, though he regards them with the eyes of a tiger ready to devour two lambs, he is softened, the sight awakens "une bonté stupide"; he is disposed to love them, he pities them, "though I", he says, "unpitied". When these two innocent creatures testify, by their caresses, their mutual love, what a sight for the Spirit of Hate! He exclaims that in the midst of the torments to which he is condemned, the greatest torment is to have lost the power of loving. Hell follows him everywhere, and he declares that he finds in his own heart a gulf more dreadful than that into which he has been hurled. All his remorse serves but to harden him, and his pity urges him to greater cruelty. Thus, as we always contemplate with pleasure a heart lacerated by remorse, that of Satan, which he himself lays open to us, excites a pleasing terror. It is by awakening terror and pity that Milton, in an action performed by three persons only, fixes our attention to such a degree that we wish for the perpetual appearance of Adam and Eve, or of Satan.

As he was not ignorant, that in an epic poem the catastrophe ought not to be fatal to the persons for whom our interest has been claimed, he is admirable in his description, at the close of the poem, of the loss of Paradise. Our first parents are not driven from Eden like criminals. An angel, full of goodwill towards them, leads them forth by the hand, after comforting them with hopes so exalted that Adam is ready to congratulate himself on a trespass which

is to procure the greatest glory to man and the greatest punishment to Satan. Both, indeed, on quitting Eden, look back and let fall some tears. Nature experiences distress, which is at once soothed by faith.

I shall say nothing of the metrical merits or defects of the poem. Ears wholly French cannot be judges of a harmony so unlike that to which they are accustomed. Milton's commentators frequently point out, and I shall observe with them in my notes, the diligence with which he cultivates one of the beauties of metrical composition, which consists in imitative harmony. This he attains by arranging words according to the quantity of the syllables and attending to the longs and shorts; in this more skilful than our own early poets, who sought to attain it by inventing the sort of words of which Ronsard and du Bartas are full. We smile when we find Paquier congratulate himself on having, in his description of Jupiter smiting the Titans, imitated the sound of the thunderbolt bursting through the cloud, in his fourth line:

> Jupin pour parer à l'outrage,
> Et à la détestable rage
> De ces furieux Loups-garoux,
> S'éclatant, d'un cri craqua tous.

Nor shall I speak of the beauties and faults of the style. It is impossible to judge such matters in another tongue. Plutarch, who had lived in Rome and had read the Latin historians, though late in life,

says, in the *Life of Demosthenes*, that he will not compare his eloquence with that of Cicero, not being skilled enough to appreciate the beauty of the Latin phrase, its precision, its images and all those qualities which constitute the force, the energy and the charm of diction; from which Plutarch concludes that every man should stay at home, the Dolphin on his proper shore. Our poets are never well understood by foreigners, even by those best acquainted with our tongue: and in the lines of the tragic poet who is the greatest master of it, how many sentiments, which depend on the justness and delicacy of the expression, escape a foreigner! This delicacy, indeed, is probably not to be found in the English tongue, since the *Spectator* writes: "If Milton attains not the sublimity of Homer, the fault should be imputed less to his genius than his tongue. A poem so divine, written in English, resembles a magnificent palace of brick; the design may not be inferior to a palace of marble, but the material is ruder." Milton, however, has even neglected to polish these materials, for Addison, his warmest admirer, is obliged to confess that in respect of style this poem has few partisans, being written in a diction often harsh and obscure.

He must, however, be allowed the merit of a simplicity frequently noble and majestic, and much more estimable, in such a theme, than a parade of ornaments. The ornaments of his style, as they are always natural, resemble those of his Eden, which

offered, he says, a wildness more pleasing than all the beauties which art, in our gardens, ranges in rows. I have often admired the energy of his expressions.

The desire of rendering him faithfully in our tongue was my incitement to this new translation, which I should not have hazarded were that which we already possess as remarkable for accuracy as for elegance. . . .

My first object, in my notes as in my translation, has been to be of use to those who take up this poem not as a diversion, but for serious study. It deserves such attention on account of the great poetic beauties it contains, and I cannot more clearly display the perfection of its design, and the manner in which all parts tend towards the action, as the rays of a circle towards the centre, than by the summary of the twelve books, which I append to these observations.

If Milton is worthy, as a poet, of serious study, he deserves so little attention as a theologian that instead of staying, in my notes, to examine his doctrine, I shall suffer God the Father to say what he chooses. Why should we concern ourselves with the theological sentiments of a poet who appears to recognise the divinity neither of the Son nor of the Holy Ghost, who admits, before the creation, a primal matter, and nowhere says that God made something out of nothing; and in whose poem an angel (Book 5) uses the language of a materialist? Yet

this poet, whose object, as he declares in his exordium, was to justify the ways of God to man, develops through his whole poem, in the clearest and sublimest manner, God's designs from the moment when he permits the fall of man to the last day of the world, the day which will renew heaven and earth, which, by the final complete reparation of that fall, will be the day of greatest glory both to the Father, to the Son, and to Man, and the day of greatest confusion and torment to Satan. Milton, therefore, had studied, meditated, understood the Christian religion. He was not ignorant of its sublimity. Did he believe in it? To what sect did he belong? Had he, indeed, any religion? Whoever has read his life will ask these questions, to which it will not be easy to reply.

What a riddle is man! Milton, in his poem, teaches us the obedience we owe to God, and, himself an enemy to the royal authority, he insults in other writings that second majesty in which we respect the first, from which it is delegated. Milton in the same poem celebrates enthusiastically, in the loftiest terms, the happiness, dignity and sacred character of the marriage state, and in another production attempted to prove himself entitled to put away his wife and take another more to his liking. Milton proclaims in this poem that we cannot draw near to God, but through a Mediator, of whom Moses was but the figure; and though the Finite cannot draw near the Infinite, but through a

Mediator, uniting in himself the human and the divine, he will never allow that this Mediator, whose greatness he proclaims, is God. Milton, loved and protected by Cromwell, quits in poverty an employment in which he might have amassed a considerable fortune, because he covets no other but poetic fame; and to acquire it, he gives his days and nights to the celebration of a religion in which perhaps (his life suggests it) he did not believe. What does he gain by this? Forty years after his death his poem was still unknown in his own country. A poet who looks for his reward to man, yet fixes on religion as his subject, has chosen ill.

THE END

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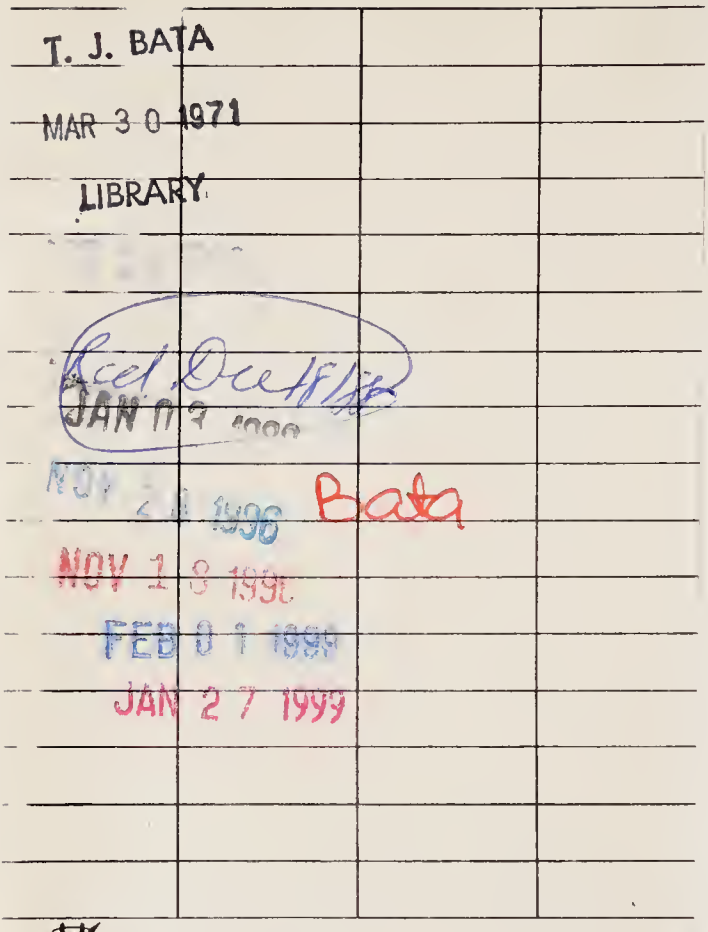

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